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# NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Nothing makes this quadragenerian feel older than seeing the kids today online; they dress a lot like I did back in the '90s, but the resemblance ends there. Tikking their Toks, crushing their candy, their relationship to digital technology is something we have yet to fully comprehend – and probably won't until Elon Musk launches Skynet and my Google Mini achieves full sentience. “Alexa, how close are we to Judgment Day?” “Sorry, I don't understand. Would you like to hear the first rule of *Fight Club*?”

I'm no technophobe, kids. Like many elder millennials, my first foray into video gaming was the boxy grey-and-white NES system, sold in a bundle with two games, two controllers, and a preposterous plastic gun to shoot pixelated ducks. As a young adult, living on a student budget, consoles and games were financially out of reach, so I contented myself with playing *Snake* on my Nokia 8210 (I told you, I'm old!). Later on in life, I'd revisit consoles but mostly as a vehicle for apps like Netflix or YouTube on my home TV. During my brief stint as the games editor here at *Rue Morgue* a few years back, I realized that the world of gaming had changed dramatically, and in really exciting ways.

First of all, indie games on Steam are leading the pack, particularly in horror gaming, and that's mighty cool. For the uninitiated, Steam is an online game marketplace for PC where you can not only drop \$60+ on the new AAA titles like *Mortal Kombat* or *Resident Evil*, but you can also find highly-rated games from indie developers, often for around \$10. While indie horror movies have to hustle hard for exposure and distribution, indie games are abundant, affordable, and very easily accessible thanks to platforms like Steam.

Secondly, the horror gaming community has a fascinating interplay between fans and developers due to the popularity of gaming content creators. Twitch streamers, for example, offer gameplay and commentary as free promotional tools, and a streamer with a wide enough reach can play an important role in a game's development and success. *The Mortuary Assistant* is a great example of that – Brian Clarke is the sole developer behind it, but the enthusiastic reception to his 2020 demo on Steam made it a hotly anticipated title, sending offers from publishers right to his inbox without the benefit of a Kickstarter campaign or marketing budget.

It's lovely to me that horror gaming has found such a symbiotic relationship between creators and players – I find it oddly comforting, in fact. It's scary to think that the next generation will be inheriting a reality we can't possibly prepare them for, but maybe there's an upside to growing up with a controller in hand rather than a rattle. I've gained a lot of wisdom from my admittedly intermittent experience as a gamer. Win or lose, it's the XP gained that matters. If you encounter enemies, you're probably going in the right direction. Life's a game you only win by trying to enjoy the fresh hell it throws at you.

Speaking of fresh hell... shit, that's no way to start a eulogy. Reporting on the sudden death of one of our writers is the kind of horror I don't relish writing about at all. Glenn Tilson has been a member of the *Rue Morgue* family for longer than I have, and although it was rare to see him out in person, he was deeply embedded in the horror community online, interacting regularly with fellow writers and fans; the pain of his loss is being felt across many borders and technologies as well as in this office. In this newfangled world of screens and DMs, it's easier than ever to take it for granted that our loved ones are always just a few clicks away – don't fall for it. Check in often, because this video game only grants us one life. R.I.P. Glenn.



ANDREA SUBISSATI  
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Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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RUE MORGUE #207 would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Weird Alice, Jon Condit, Nicole Pitre, and Al McMullan.

RUE MORGUE #207 is dedicated to the memory of Glenn Tilson. R.I.P.

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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



**NOW THAT** *Rue Morgue* is turning 25 years this year I wanted to tell you how floored I am. I never thought in my wildest dreams I would still be reading it in 2022 – that's a major achievement! Your publication has really taken wing, and has changed and morphed throughout the years but has always remained the barometer for what is happening in horror at home and abroad. I remember back in the days when it was a black and white zine – humble beginnings – and yes, I've been a reader that long. Congratulations on all you do, Rodrigo, you have changed the landscape for horror around the world and for that and so much more, I salute you brother!

**ALLAN JAMES POWELL, VIA EMAIL**

**HI ANDREA.** Just digging into *RM#205*. Just wanted to say that, as an atheist with a large degree of biblical knowledge, I found your Easter Note From Underground to be utterly delightful. Keep up the great work.

**CAM ASCROFT, VIA FACEBOOK**

**[THE VIGIL, RM#198]** was a slow burn and really eerie movie, a good look at grief with a great performance by the lead actor. I'm so happy *@RueMorgue* led me to this movie; well worth the watch!

**@SASK\_FROG, VIA TWITTER**

**IF I CAN RECOMMEND** one thing on International Women's Day, it has to be the super fucking badass women on the *@RueMorgue TV* YouTube channel. *@necromandrea* *@ScareAlex* *@witchayyywoman*, you rule. (Also, the *@FacultyofHorror* podcast changed my life!)

**@HORRORCOLLECT, VIA TWITTER**

**GOTTA ADMIT**, when I get the latest issue of *@RueMorgue* and, flipping through before diving in, I see that *@breannimator* or *@dedecrim* (for example) have a review, I get insanely happy. I love seeing people I care about/respect doing well and giving me cool new stuff to check out.

**@DUUGY13, VIA TWITTER**

**MY NAME IS KENNETH** Horne, I have had a subscription with you guys for a while now. *Absolutely love* the magazine. I have most of the old *Rue Morgue Radio* CDs too. My kids and I love the show, I miss it. I've even been on a mission

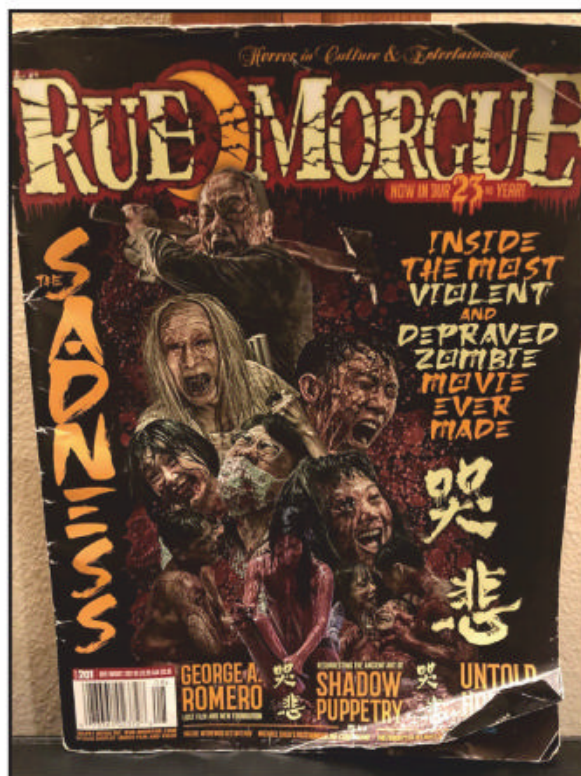
buying up as many older magazines that I don't have as well. I have the majority (there are still plenty I haven't found yet) but the search continues. I got #205 Mar-Apr in the mail today and noticed I haven't received #204. Hope you guys haven't forgotten about me. Perhaps it was lost in the mail. *Please*, if it's no problem, could you resend it? *Thanks-a-million!*

**KENNETH LEBRON HORNE – CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE**

*Hi Kenneth, sorry to hear you are having some trouble receiving your issues of Rue Morgue. Of course we can provide you with a replacement; it's on its way! -Ed*

**THIS IS HOW BIG** of a nerd I am... After watching *The Sadness* last night, I re-read the July/August 2021 issue of *@RueMorgue* and then I watched *The Sadness* again!

**@DELJAMESGANG, VIA TWITTER**



**WHY DOES EVERYTHING** have to have a sequel? What's next, *Let's Scare Jessica to Death Again?* *Another Messiah of Evil?* *Ei8ht?* *Possession 2: Possess Harder?* *Get a Bit Further Out?* *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night with a Vengeance?*

**@THROATSPROCKETS, VIA INSTAGRAM**

**RE: KILLER CANUCK** on *Rue Morgue TV* – I've always had a crush on David Manners. Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia (what?!), Manners starred in *Dracula*, *The Mummy*, and *The Black Cat*, among others. To make things even better, he was a gayling too! Nice capsule review (under eight minutes) of his life and career.

**DAVE STEWART, VIA FACEBOOK**

**RE: KILLER CANUCK** covering *Scanners* on *Rue Morgue TV* – Another mind-blowing episode! Mind-blowing? Because it's about *Scanners*... get it? Sigh... never mind.

**ARKON29, VIA YOUTUBE**

**I ABSOLUTELY ADORE** the Sympathy For The Sequel series [on *Rue Morgue TV*! Alex West has such a fun and engaging enthusiasm for the films. I wish the episodes were longer!

**KEVIN'S HAUNTED TOY BOX, VIA YOUTUBE**

**THIS WEEK'S PIERCING** The Veil column on [Rue-Morgue.com] embraces astral projection through positivity and believing in our own shine. *@RootDownTarot* takes us on a ride to The Further through the lens of *Insidious* and *Dr. Sleep*. What a fascinating read!

**@RAINBOWDORITO, VIA TWITTER**

**THAT WATCH PARTY** with *@RueMorgue* last night was a blast! So happy you were able to join us, *@RobJabbaz!*

**@JAY\_WIGGER, VIA TWITTER**

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# CORONER'S REPORT

## WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE #  
207

During World War II, the US government almost went ahead with "Project Fantasia," wherein glow-in-the-dark foxes would be deployed to frighten the Japanese.

In the UK, the 1932 film *Vampyr* was the first to receive the "H" classification for "likely to horrify anyone under 16."

The tragic launching of the HMS *Albion* in 1898, where 38 people were drowned by the resulting bow wave, is believed to be the first disaster caught on film.

Chuck "Entertainment" Lamb, a programmer from Ohio, has become famous for playing dead bodies in film and television.

In 1908, George Millet died while fleeing the grasp of six young women intent on giving him kisses for his fifteenth birthday; as he fell forward, the point of an ink eraser in his shirt pocket pierced his heart, killing him.

The cinema sequence in 1982's killer rat flick *Deadly Eyes* was filmed at Toronto's Regent Theatre (then called The Crest), which is still in operation today.

Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia is defined as the fear of long words.

The final credits of the 2002 Bruce Campbell flick *Bubba Ho-Tep* proclaimed "Elvis will return in *Bubba Nosferatu: Curse of the She-Vampires*." Sadly, this sequel never saw the light of day.

In Washington State, there is an ordinance declaring "sasquatch" an official endangered species, thereby making it illegal to kill one.

The title character in 1987's *Predator* was originally to be portrayed by action star Jean-Claude Van Damme, but he was replaced early in production by the much larger Kevin Peter Hall.

Dutch-born American serial killer Harry Powers (né Herman Drenth) was the inspiration for the Preacher in 1955's *The Night of the Hunter*.

The Italian island of Poveglia is said to be the most haunted place in the world, having housed plague victims in the late 1700s and, later, mental patients.

Kurt Russell spent a full year growing out his hair and beard before shooting John Carpenter's *The Thing*.

COMPILED BY JAY CLARK  
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT?  
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## EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORQUE'S  
SOCIAL MEDIA

What **horror villain** would be the worst at video games and why?

The Blob. No thumbs.

ADAM GALLANT, VIA FACEBOOK

Cthulhu — no console or keyboard is big enough for him.

YOURI GAVRILOV, VIA FACEBOOK

Michael Myers... one-track mind.

@THE\_BROAD\_BAKES\_19\_99, VIA  
INSTAGRAM

The evil STD from *It Follows*.

DAVID W JONES, VIA FACEBOOK

I'm gonna go with Candyman...for obvious reasons.

MATTHEW BESSON, VIA FACEBOOK

Pinhead because he's more of a "hands on" puzzle Rubik's Cube kinda guy.

THOMAS J HILLHOUSE, VIA FACEBOOK

Trickster from *Brainscan*. He'd pass the buck onto you to play.

NICHOLAS HANSLO, VIA FACEBOOK



## FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



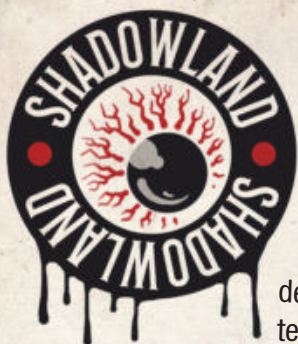
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TO BE IN WHITE."

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS  
JASON BLACK, VIA FACEBOOK

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## PINHEAD READS *PIERCING FANS INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY*

When Clive Barker debuted his 1987 splatterpunk classic *Hellraiser*, mainstream audiences must have assumed the exquisitely mutilated cenobites could only have emerged from the darkest recesses of the novelist's imagination. But as creative as Barker is, he wasn't alone in his imaginings of the ways in which flesh can be explored, altered, and violated. In fact, when collaborating with his makeup team to design the agents of Hell, Barker had a real-life point of reference: *Piercing Fans International Quarterly*.

*PFIQ* started as a black-and-white zine distributed at The Gauntlet, America's first body piercing-only studio, opened in West Hollywood by Jim Ward in the mid-1970s. Keegan Williams of *OUT FRONT Magazine* described Ward's work as pioneering the intersection of kink, queerness, and piercing culture, influenced by the gay S&M scene in New York and Colorado.

To raise hype for his burgeoning studio, Ward collaborated with fellow piercer and body modification practitioner Fakir Musafar to produce the first issue of *PFIQ* in October 1977. The cover featured an illustration of a

naked man covered in tattoos, clad in kink paraphernalia, and sporting a Prince Albert piercing on what can only be described as a generously proportioned member — a bold statement from the underground community to the world.

As Ward expanded to studio locations in San Francisco, New York, Seattle, and Paris, so too did the magazine's footprint. This inevitably drew controversy as it reached the public eye, with some countries branding it obscene and confiscating copies. Yet *PFIQ* persisted as it transitioned to colour and, by the early 1990s, expanded its distribution beyond Gauntlet locations. Over the course of its run, it featured articles on various types of piercing, how-to guides, artwork, fiction, and profiles on prominent figures in the piercing community. There was even a "Pin Pals" section that acted as a personals page, allowing readers to connect with one another through messages forwarded via their subscription codes.

Although *PFIQ* ended when The Gauntlet closed its doors in 1998, its legacy had already hooked and penetrated mainstream culture; while queer and kink communities still fought an uphill battle against a sexually

repressed culture, pioneers like Barker and Ward brought the lifestyle a little further out of the fringes. Admittedly, the cenobites were pretty extreme in their proclivities (we've yet to see flayed throats at the BDSM bars) but as a queer artist who wasn't shy about sharing his love of kink, Barker truly had such sights to show us, and opened more than a few minds on the merits of sweet suffering.

**BRYAN CHRISTOPHER**



## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

**Sammy Snyders, Jamie from *The Pit* (1981)**

Canadian-born *Sam Snyders* found acting early in life: after numerous commercials and voice-over gigs, he landed the role of Tom Sawyer in the 1979 TV show *Huckleberry Finn and His Friends*. On the strength of that series, director Lew Lehman cast him as the precocious Jamie in his horror film *The Pit*. In complete contrast to Tom Sawyer, Jamie is weird, anti-social and has some very dangerous associates. When not talking to his teddy bear or peeping on his babysitter, he is feeding the creatures he found in a hole in a

nearby forest — and they have rather particular appetites. After *The Pit*, Snyders quit acting and went back to his first love of dance. After decades of performing, he became a choreographer and then an instructor in his hometown of Toronto. More recently, he became a representative for Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union.

**JAY CLARKE**





# NEEDFUL THINGS



## 1 GHOST FACE TIE DYE BOXER BRIEFS

\$25 USD

Hello, skivvies! We're not sure what "PSD" stands for, but we're gonna guess "Pretty Spooky Drawers." Let Ghost Face protect your stabby bits with these polyester/spandex boxer briefs featuring flatlock seams and a soft, wide elastic waist. And bonus: breathable athletic material in case you find yourself on the run from a franchise that won't stay dead!

[PsdUnderwear.com](http://PsdUnderwear.com)



## 2 SQUID GAME ALARM CLOCK

\$89 USD

Getting out of bed isn't that hard – with the right motivation, that is. Inspired by the "Red light, green light" scene from the hit Netflix show, this sweet and innocent doll rotates her head and shoots pellets at you for your own good! Also available without "bullets," but where's the fun in that?

[Fruugo.ca](http://Fruugo.ca)



## 3 FREDDY KRUEGER DOG COSTUME

\$25.99 USD

One, two, dogs love Halloween too! The holiday is just around the corner, and you can't walk your little nightmare down Elm Street without this three-piece Freddy Krueger outfit by Rubies Costume Company. Welcome to prime time, pooch!

[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)



## 4 HANNIBAL LECTER RING

\$35 - \$125 USD

The doctor is in, and he's got a mean appetite. Available in your choice of brass or sterling silver, these Hannibal Lecter rings are 100% handcrafted and made to order, as unique as your custom-made skin suit. Pairs well with fava beans and a nice chianti.

[Macabria.com](http://Macabria.com)

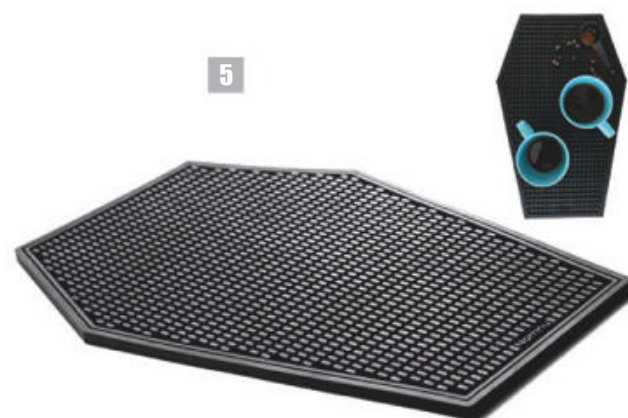


## 5 NOMNU COFFIN SPILL MAT

\$35.97 USD

Use it for hot blood, use it for cold blood – this killer coffin spill mat is perfect for anywhere you spill your drink! Durable, dishwasher safe and spooky as all heck, it's a necessary evil for your home bar.

[Nomnu.com](http://Nomnu.com)







## CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

### WONDER GOBLIN'S POCKET PALS

Based out of Moreland, Georgia, Wonder Goblin (a.k.a. James Sizemore) is known for his line of 8- to 14-inch highly detailed collectibles of monsters, goblins, and multi-eyed Eldritch gods. His Pocket Pals line boasts the same quality but is smaller in scale and cast in a different material: rather than the expensive soft vinyl typically used for his full-size sofubi toys, Pocket Pals are keshi-style, made of hard rubber. Currently available in three styles and blind-boxed for a surprise colour, these items are a fun throw-back to the days of collectible mini pencil erasers sold in vending machines of the '90s.

#### INSPIRATION

"I love that old toy line Monster in My Pocket that came out in the '90s. They had a whole bunch of crazy little monster designs in small keshi form, and they were super easy to get. You could just go down to a 7-Eleven or K-Mart and grab one. I thought I should do something like that, except a much smaller and more hands-on approach."

#### MATERIALS

Soft vinyl, rubber

#### PRICE

\$7 – \$11

#### FIND IT

[WonderGoblin.com](http://WonderGoblin.com)

CHRIS HAMMOND



## VINTAGE AND CLASSIC

### SAW "BILLY THE PUPPET" PLUSH DOLL

(Sideshow Collectibles, 2004)

Written by Leigh Whannell and directed by James Wan, 2004's *Saw* launched one of horror cinema's most lucrative franchises and introduced audiences to "Billy" – the genre's most memorable doll since Chucky. Clad in a mini black tuxedo with red bowtie and handkerchief, the ventriloquist dummy-styled figure is used by serial killer John Kramer/Jigsaw (played by Tobin Bell) to deliver messages to his victims. Following the success of the movie, several Billy-themed collectibles were released – one of them being a 12.5-inch doll from Sideshow Collectibles. Sporting a soft plush body with fabric

outfit, the doll features a hard vinyl head with hair, vinyl hands, and black shoes (interestingly, many Billy figures feature red shoes). The nicely sculpted face has a much smoother texture than the puppet used in the film but does feature the character's trademark red and black eyes, red lips, and spirals on its cheeks. The doll was released unboxed and features a hangtag copyrighted 2004. Occasionally found on eBay, it can fetch \$100 or more in mint condition.

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORGUE.COM





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# SCARED STIFF

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

**I**T'S A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT, AND THE RAIN AGAINST THE WINDOWS OF THE MORTUARY CASTS FLICKERING SHADOWS ACROSS THE EMBALMING ROOM where a fresh corpse awaits the touch of your cold, sharp instruments. A clipboard lists the stages of your task, starting with examining the dull, grey skin for identifying marks. The wiring of the jaw entails hammering barbed needles in before yanking the mandible shut, and adhesive eye caps are inserted to hide the blank, bleary gaze of the dead. Next, a scalpel incision at the neck exposes raw wet meat, and mechanized suction draws a cascade of blood out of the body, down the table and into the drain.

Meanwhile, a cocktail fit for a cadaver is mixed: glutaraldehyde, methanol, humectant, and formaldehyde. Maneuvering a large trocar through the corpse's abdominal cavity to send embalming fluid into every fleshy nook and cranny, you feel as though something is watching you perform your tasks, breathing down your neck. It's not your imagination — something sinister haunts the sterile halls of River Fields Mortuary, something demonic that will stop at nothing to secure a new vessel for its nefarious ends. It's up to you alone, the mortuary assistant, to bind this malevolence to a mortal coil and destroy it before succumbing to its evil influence...

Such is the scenario that awaits in DarkStone Digital's uber creepy and hotly anticipated new horror game, *The Mortuary Assistant*, coming in July. As apprentice mortician Rebecca, players face the twin tasks of completing her embalming duties on a morgue







full of cadavers while an evil force tests their strength of will (and stomach) by way of vivid, terrifying hallucinations. With a simulated embalming process so detailed and immersive, it doesn't take much to ramp up the creep factor by way of strange sounds, shifting architecture, lights suddenly turning off, and shadowy visitors lurking in the periphery of vision with glowing red eyes. Will this next corpse suddenly sit upright and intone ancient scripture, or suddenly clamp its shrivelled jaw down on your probing fingers? It well might. *The Mortuary Assistant* is part mortuary science simulator, part haunted house attraction, and sheer immersive horror for those brave enough to undertake this terrifying apprenticeship.

This full-length version of the game arrives on a wave of great anticipation ever since an early prototype became a viral hit on streaming platforms, leading to the launch of a free playable demo on itch.io and Steam in 2020. Naturally, the unique title also caught the eye of numerous large publishers, but DarkStone's sole proprietor and developer, Brian Clarke, entrusted his pet project to game studio *Dread XP*, an offshoot of the horror media site Dread Central that specializes in indie genre titles [see sidebar]. Expectations are appropriately high, but Clarke is more than up to the challenge: having cut his teeth as an environment artist in AAA gaming, he's keenly aware of the immersive experience horror gaming has to offer, and what it takes to transport players away from their PCs, into a place of nightmares. *The Mortuary Assistant* is his fourth title in as many years, and the self-taught programmer created an entirely custom haunt system for its paranormal events, ensuring that no two players have the exact same game-play experience.

Like Rebecca in the dark corridors of River Fields, Clarke has been burning the midnight oil on *The Mortuary Assistant*, labouring under the weight of encroaching deadlines and soaring expectations that have tested his own sanity as much as his plucky heroine's. We caught up with the indie developer to introduce you to what is destined to be, if you'll pardon the pun, a real game-changer.

### How long have you been working on *The Mortuary Assistant*?

I was in the middle of working on *Our Secret Below* [2020], more of a thriller/escape room thing with some horror elements but not quite horror. I had a Kickstarter going for it and I wanted to give an example of the sort of work that I do, just so that there was something people could see, because I didn't have a demo for [*Our Secret Below*]. I was like, "Well, what's something in a creepy setting that I could do in a short period of time and [would] give me a lot of material to work with to do spooky stuff?" I decided a dead body in a room, so that's where




the whole embalming process and everything spawned from. And all that was like five minutes of gameplay; you literally just went in, collected some items that you were going to use for embalming, and while that happened some noises happened, there are various scares that *could* happen, but not always, etc. So it was kind of the beginnings of the idea and I put that up and that actually gained some traction with a number of different content creators. That was in the middle of developing my last game so I was like, "Oh

no, this is the game I should be making!" But I finished up my previous one and started this one.

**You have a disclaimer at the start of the game that says it is based on real paranormal events.**

That's a little half-truth — part of it is for setting the tone, for setting the mood of the game. I wanted to start off on a strong foot to just get people in the mindset of "This could happen to you," in line with the films that I like where [the





"I'M TAKING CARE TO BE SPECIFIC WITH THINGS, TO TRY TO BE AS REALISTIC AS POSSIBLE."

— CREATOR BRIAN CLARKE

**Dead At Night:** Rebecca's first shift as **The Mortuary Assistant** is a nightmarish evening of carving up cadavers and clinging to her sanity while demons come to play.

danger] is something you don't really have control over; that could happen to anybody, no matter what you do. And then some of the events [in the game] are inspired or taken from closed-circuit television [footage] and things caught on camera, that kind of stuff. There are also a few events that happened to me when I was younger that I wanted to put in.

#### **Such as?**

When I was pretty young — eleven, maybe — we had this hallway in the house that had a door on either end and I remember going in and closing the door behind me, not realizing that the other door in front of me was closed. So when I closed it, it was like pitch black, and I remember just throwing myself around the hall, trying to find a door, and it seemed like there were no doors. So I felt like I was flailing around in there forever until I finally found one and pushed through. Now that's obviously not based on anything paranormal, but it was weird enough for me to want to create something like that [for *The Mortuary Assistant*], so I have this hallway sequence where a familiar hall from the game gets a treatment where there's a bunch of different ways that you could go and they all sort of connect together and everything; I wanted to kind of recreate that.

#### **You clearly did your research when it comes to mortuary methods and materials. How close is the game's embalming process to the real thing?**

As close as I could get it! I did a *lot* of research;

I watched videos for students that are going into the mortuary sciences, I've read lots of documentation on all the different equipment used, [and then] there's all just the regular videos of what it's like inside of a mortuary, and basically everything in between. I knew I was going to be doing the embalming because that's what people really wanted after playing the prototype. I was like, "Alright, I have to build a system for this and I'm not going to make it wrong, because I want it to be realistic enough that people question if that's actually how it's done." So the process that you do is the process that is done for embalming, however some things are obviously removed, or they're an abbreviated version of it for gameplay reasons, or I've mixed up some of the equipment that's used. I used some old equipment and some new equipment, and it's all for pushing the gameplay aspect.

#### **Did any actual morticians weigh in on the demo?**

I have had a number of morticians reach out to me about how they think it's cool that I'm making this game about their work and that they're really impressed with how accurate it is, and then there's always a little bit of feedback of "Well, actually, the way we do it is like this," or "We use this instrument." And I love getting that feedback; it's really cool to have people so passionate that they want to reach out and give this information. Also, it's a chance for people to share their knowledge, so they want to do that. When these scenarios come up, it's like I know

I'm doing it wrong, but I'm doing it wrong on purpose because it's a horror game first and it's not a simulation. I didn't want to go so heavily into the granular details of it because that would take you out of what the game actually is. But on the broad level, [the embalming] is how it happens; the blood coming out and running down the bed until it turns clear because you flushed everything out of the system, etc. The filling with cavity fluid with a trocar — I've removed some of that process because you actually remove [the organs] first with it, but that's a good example of some of the process I've skipped because I didn't want to have the player doing the same thing multiple times.

#### **Is the occult storyline as researched and detailed as the mortuary stuff?**

Somewhat. The thing is, I've created sort of my own demonology for everything because I didn't want to subscribe to one particular [faith system]; I didn't want to go with a branch of Christianity or any sort of Wiccan or Satanic whatever. I didn't want to take from anything specific because it's really easy to be wrong in those venues. Also, there's the fact that I wanted to create something that I could easily work with, something that was malleable, something where if I wanted to have something work a certain way or have spirits associated with certain things, I'd be able to do that. So I've created somewhat of a demonology plus a history on the



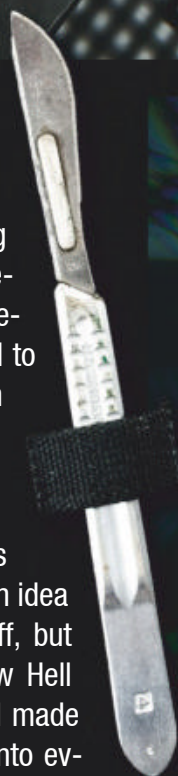


“[THE MORTUARY ASSISTANT] CAN BE DIFFERENT FOR EVERYBODY, EVERY TIME, ALWAYS.”

— CREATOR BRIAN CLARKE



religious side as well, without trying to go too much into everything. I've basically given a background for why you're using the things that you're using during the embalming and dealing with the demons the way that you are, why the demons are there, how they're connected to the various things that you're seeing in the environment, and what you need to do to ultimately win the game. I wanted [players] to take in this information as something new, but familiar — that's why it is based obviously in the Christian idea of Hell and Satan and that sort of stuff, but that's pretty much where it ends. How Hell is formed, its structure and hierarchy, I made up how that looks and how it all ties into everything. I decided to mostly go with a newly created lore for all of that, just to stay out of any particular lane.



**Playing With The Dead:** (From top) Developer Brian Clarke put ample research into the embalming aspects of *The Mortuary Assistant*, while programming a complex and unique haunt system for the game's many scare sequences.

**Are the different cadavers and hauntings programmed to emerge at random, or does the game play out the same way for everyone?**

It doesn't play out the same way for everyone and it's not quite random. This is actually where the bulk of the development went into the game. I've spent a lot of time making this whole system that I called the Haunt System. It's basically a system that has a bucket of all these "events" — they're sort of bespoke events, but I've made them to work a certain way. The Haunt System is constantly monitoring the player — monitoring what point in the game they're at, what they're doing, where they're facing, are the lights on or off — all these sorts of things and obviously game

progression as well — how many bodies have they completed, that sort of stuff. If you meet the criteria for one of these events, the Haunt System then tries to run it. Say there's an event with the shadow dude standing in the hallway; if you're in the embalming room, you might see it down the hallway leading to cold storage but if you're in the hallway leading to the embalming room, you might see it in the embalming room or it might show up in the waiting room. So it's the same event but it's tailoring itself to what you're doing. Then there's the reactionary side of things where I'm doing a lot of monitoring of the screen and where the player is looking, how fast they're turning, to make sure they don't miss something. If something is visually blocking the

way [of a haunt event], I monitor all that stuff too, and that's what creates what I've been thinking of as a reverse jump-scare; where instead of me taking your camera, forcing it a certain way, and doing something spooky at you, it'll be something out of the corner of your eye and it won't do anything — it'll just be staring at you until you look at it and then it will react. But also, if you don't [look at it], if you decide to turn away or ignore it, there are systems that will then check to see if that's happening and will remove it and that event goes back into the bucket to eventually be run again. If you do experience it, the Haunt System removes it and you don't see it again for that play session. So that's where the bulk of the development is going, into this system, so it can



WHEN THE PANDEMIC PUT THE WORLD ON FREEZE, THE MINDS AT DREAD CENTRAL TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP INDIE GAMES WITH DREAD XP

# GOING FOR THE KILL

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

**A**S A GENRE, HORROR HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FERTILE GROUND FOR INDIE CREATIVES, BE IT IN MOVIES OR VIDEO GAMES. But where the former struggled over the past several years of uncertainty, the latter has flourished – thanks in no small part to some enterprising creatives at Dread Central.

“When COVID hit, all the film production shut down,” says Ted Hentschke, who worked at Gamestop with former DC editor-in-chief Steve Barton when they were teenagers. “So Patrick Ewald, the guy that runs Epic Pictures [who acquired *Dread Central* in 2019], came to us as a group and said, ‘Okay, what are we going to do? What content are we going to create from our homes?’”

The answer came in the form of the gaming studio *Dread XP*, for which Hentschke is now head of production. Originally conceived as a news site in a similar vein as Dread Central, the young company seized the opportunity to provide horror fans with some easily accessible scare fare while isolated at home and tethered to their screens. Dread XP’s first release as a developer, 2020’s *Dread X Collection*, is a lighthearted compilation of ten mini-games from ten indie developers – an anthology of bite-sized frights for around ten bucks.

The idea was partly inspired by the community of indie developers who used the mini-game format as an opportunity to experiment; games are sometimes developed via “game jams,” organized events where programmers pull together a game from scratch within a fixed time limit, sometimes competing and sometimes just for kicks.

“I noticed that there’s all these mini games coming out and they’re all made in, like, six hours or whatever by somebody in school, and some of them are really cool,” Hentschke tells *Rue Morgue*. “So I thought, what if I try to find ten good devs that could do a game jam-style thing, but that has a really good quality to it, in a week? That’s where the first *Dread X Collection* came from.”

The experiment was a hit; so much so that, in true horror fashion, a franchise was born. *Dread X Collections 2* and *3* released later that year with twelve mini-games each, with the latest installment, *Dread X Collection:*

*The Hunt*, focusing entirely on shooter-style games. Fun, affordable, and requiring little in terms of time commitment or elaborate hardware, the *Dread X Collection* not only served an appetite for the horror gaming community, it gave indie developers a platform to get their work into the hands of those who would appreciate it most – developers like Brian Clarke, who would go on to work with Dread XP on his upcoming full-length game, *The Mortuary Assistant*.

“The first big thing is supporting people who couldn’t do it on their own – who had this big dream as an indie developer but they didn’t have any funds, they didn’t have any support,” says Abbey “Scrunchy” Smith, who joined Dread XP as producer and content manager. “Brian is a really fine example. If you have the skills and you have the imagination and you’re good at what you do, you can make it in this industry.”

In addition to the mini-game collections, Dread XP published the supremely unique Lovecraftian dating sim/visual novel *Sucker for Love* last winter, where gamers play an amateur occultist who uses a hot pink edition of the *Necronomicon* to summon (and yes, seduce) such eldritch figures as the tentacle-faced L’eta of the Cthulhu mythos, or Estir, based on Hastur, the King in Yellow. A recently launched demo of *My Friendly Neighborhood* has players solving puzzles while blasting away giant puppets, and the upcoming *Dread Delusion* invites gamers to an open-world RPG adventure steeped in retro 3-D aesthetics.

Hentschke and Smith agree that one bright side after a rough few years is that there’s never been a better time for indie horror gaming – for fans and developers alike.

“What I love about Dread XP that is important to highlight is that we’re all a bunch of people that are not only passionate about video games but *indie horror games* specifically,” says Smith. “Our whole team is full of people who just love to play indie horror. It’s very important for us as a company to include everyone, and our ethos with this is so strong because we are those people we pick and choose to support.” 🧟



be different for everybody, every time, always. Even if you've experienced everything, the order in which they happen, where they happen, it's still going to be different. Right now, in the demo that's up on Steam, I think there's only like twenty-some events that could play – I'm aiming for about 100, maybe 150, maybe more; as many as I can make for the full game.

***In the demo, players don't get hurt or killed by anything. Do more direct threats come later or is it more about enduring the horrific night at the mortuary?***

Basically [the player is] experiencing becoming possessed, that's the main thing – you're starting to hear things, you're starting to see things, things that will eventually start interacting with you in some ways – but most of it is stuff happening *at* you. Then, while that's happening, you're trying to basically beat the clock before you succumb to being possessed. I'm trying to make events that still give you some interesting story and still give you some satisfaction if you lose, so if you become possessed, there's still information and you still have more questions from it. Also, there's a save system so you'll be able to go back and try again. But the whole idea is that you are sort of phasing in and out of these hallucinations and you're hearing stuff and you're seeing things and it ramps up over time. So at the beginning it's really small and it keeps building, building, building, until you're on the large events and you're either about to become possessed or you managed to fill everything out correctly, figure everything out, and win the game.

***Did the positive response to the 2020 demo put added pressure on you, as a one-person developer?***

The prototype and the demo, each of those built [the hype] further, so it's like, "Okay, this is clearly something good that the people like – don't mess it up." Everything feels like I'm just kind of balancing it all and I think any developer, especially a solo developer or any artist or creative type, has a massive case of imposter syndrome, which I definitely have in spades. So I keep looking at things like, "Okay, they can't possibly like this so I've got to make sure it's really good next time," and that obviously gives extra undue pressure to things. But I'm still trying to meet deadlines and I'm still trying to meet expectations that people have.

***Do you think video games have the potential to be more terrifying than movies or books?***

They can; I think there's a big challenge there. With a movie you're being shown everything – you can set the tone, you can set up the story, you can set up the scares, you can set up everything, and if the person's in the right mindset, they can have a creepy experience. I think



***“TO ACTUALLY BUILD SUSPENSE... IS HARDER TO DO FOR VIDEO GAMES.”***

**– CREATOR BRIAN CLARKE**

games have a little bit of a higher hurdle because the setting and the ambience has to be *really* good. The term “immersion” gets thrown around so much for games but if you manage to create an experience that sucks the player in and they forget that they're sitting down at their computer, interacting with this thing, then I think you can break through to that, but for other mediums, like books or movies, you can just have it shown to you and it's freaky. A video game can glitch out, it can have moments where maybe the graphics take you out of it for some reason; if you've established a certain look but it doesn't quite land in another scenario, and maybe you misstep on how you built something or a piece of story or a certain event – anything can take you out of it, so you've got to be really careful with how you build these things, to try and make sure you've got the player sucked in. There are things that build atmosphere no matter what the graphics look like, but you have to set that

mood and keep it. When you have that and you have a player's attention with that, then yeah, I think you can be extra spooky. Jump-scares are used a lot in games and I think they're definitely a tool in the shed for horror, but to actually build that suspense, build that environment, and build that creepy feeling, I think that's harder to do for video games. The potential is there to give an experience that is more impactful, but it's harder to get there.

***Has anyone objected to the game on moral or ethical grounds?***

You know, I haven't experienced that! No one's been particularly offended by it or had any real issue with it, and I think part of that is because I'm taking care to be specific with things, to try to be as realistic as possible. The only complaints I've gotten is that the bodies aren't naked, which is really weird to me. But, you know, there's something for everybody, I guess! 🙄



TORONTO-BASED STUDIO LAUNDRY BEAR MARKS ITS FIFTH YEAR OF BRINGING THE MORTUARY EXPERIENCE TO GAMERS



# A MORTICIAN'S TALE

BY ANDREA SUBISSATI

**B**RIAN CLARKE'S UPCOMING *THE MORTUARY ASSISTANT* is likely the most terrifying video game to be based on the mortuary sciences, but it's not the first: that title belongs to *A Mortician's Tale*, a simulation/visual novel that first hit Steam in 2017 and is also available in the Apple Store. Developed by Toronto-based indie studio Laundry Bear, *A Mortician's Tale* aims to inform and inspire players via the story of new mortician Charlie, embarking on her career at a local funeral home. Her tasks include embalming and cremation procedures but also grappling with some difficult subjects that surround the gig: dealing with the bereaved, respecting the dead's wishes, and keeping one's morality intact in what people often forget is a lucrative business.

"*A Mortician's Tale* is a very linear game in that it doesn't split off [storylines] based on what you're doing," says the game's creative director Gabby DaRienzo. "But there is an element of participation in the gameplay – you are the one that is interacting with people, you are the one conducting the funeral, you are the one who is embalming the body, etc. I think having that experience and having to physically do those things is very different from watching a scene play out on a movie or reading about it in a book, for example. And I think by doing that, it's pushing people out of their comfort zone."

Indeed, *A Mortician's Tale* doesn't trade in guts and gore, but its topics are nonetheless disquieting. Eavesdropping on mourners at the funeral, Charlie overhears the ways that people actually respond to death: regret, anger, confusion, and blame. One storyline involves a conflict where the family of the deceased have differing preferences about how the body should be handled than what the departed had wished. Another challenging subject is tackled in the form of an email newsletter Charlie receives from a death-positive organization, discussing queerness in relation to end-of-life care.

"I asked my writer Kait Tremblay to write about LGBTQ+ rights after death, specifically trans rights after death, because this is a very unfortunate thing that happens – people will misgender their loved ones after death," she explains. "They will put their dead names on the graves. It's an awful, awful thing and

we wanted to make sure we talked about it because not enough people know about this or know about the steps they can take to protect themselves or their loved ones."

Another critical streak running through *A Mortician's Tale* deals with Charlie's mom-and-pop funeral home being bought out by a large franchise. Not only does this change affect the overall attitude of the job, the new management encourages Charlie to exploit her grieving clients by trying to upsell them on more expensive funerary packages.

"One of the things I was really upset about, learning more about the industry, is just how, like everything else, it revolves around money," says DaRienzo. "I don't think they intentionally do this, but I think funeral homes, specifically Western funeral homes, benefit from people not having knowledge, they benefit from people saying, 'I don't know what to do – here, you take care of it and I'll just give you money.' I think that when you have this knowledge about these processes and practices, you're better able to make decisions for yourself and your loved ones before they die."

In the end, DaRienzo hopes that players come away with a deeper understanding of the funerary industry, and the wealth of options that are out there for those unafraid to seek them out. Just as Charlie takes steps to ensure that she's making a meaningful difference for her clients through her work, *A Mortician's Tale* offers its players much more than a fun time embalming bodies.

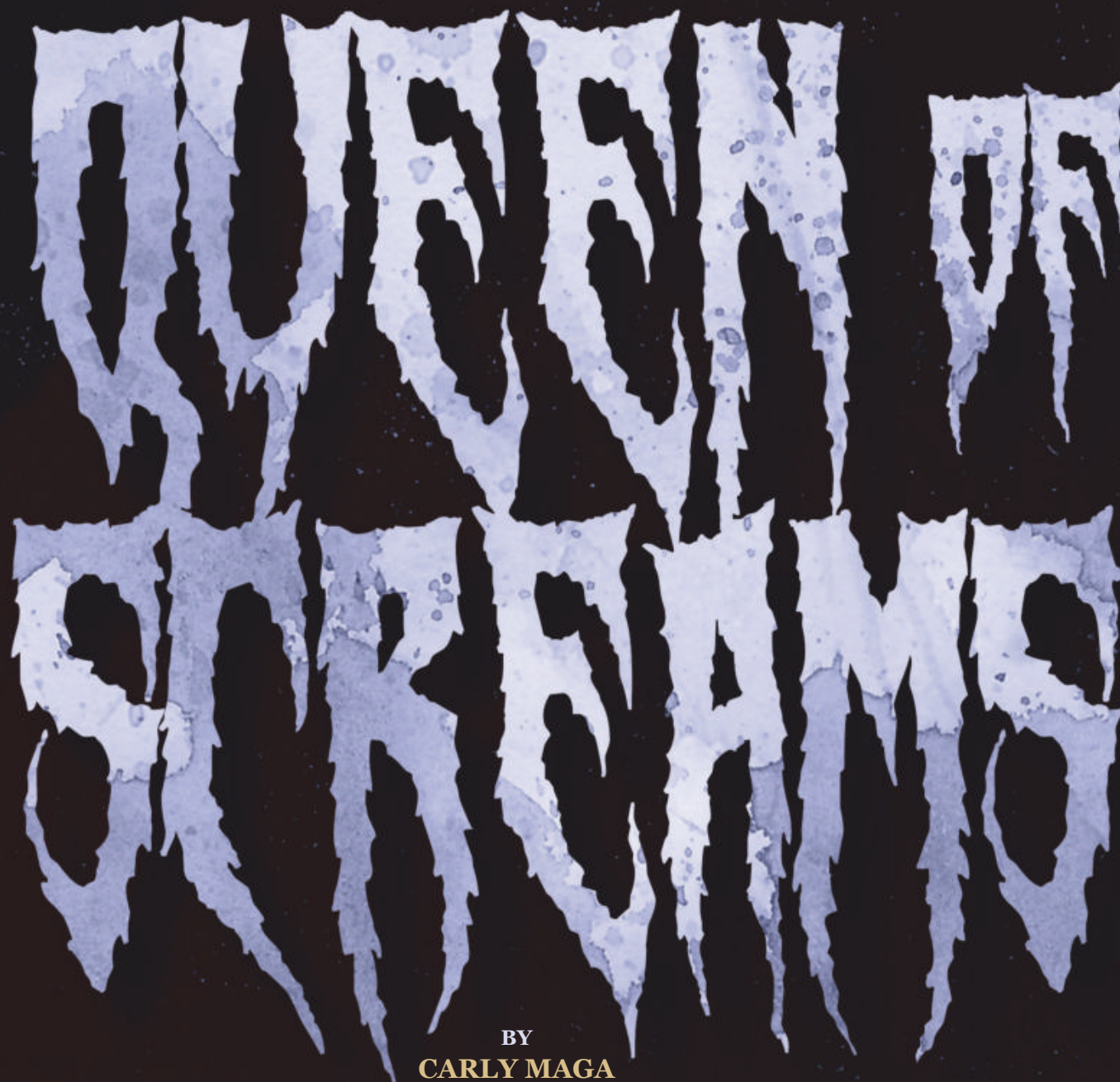
"My goal with this game was to find the balance of making sure it was accessible to people, knowing this is a sensitive subject, but also being honest and truthful with the subject matter," says DaRienzo, who notes that she still receives email from grateful players after five years. "I want people to be able to understand these things so they can advocate for themselves and, of course, I know some people are just going to play the game – maybe they already know this stuff, maybe they just enjoy the story or whatever, and that's great too. But I hope that if someone gets something out of this, it's being comfortable enough to even just talk about it." 🧡







VETERAN ACTOR ALICE KRIGE TALKS ABOUT HER MOST NOTABLE CHARACTERS FROM 40-PLUS YEARS ON THE SCREAM SCREEN, ALONG WITH HER ROLE IN THE UPCOMING PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR FILM *SHE WILL*



BY  
CARLY MAGA

**You know Alice Krige's face. Throughout her four decades as an actor in theatre, film, and TV, there hasn't been another quite like it:** the severe cheekbones, the cupid's bow lips, and most importantly, the intense stares that betray complex mental machinations going on inside – as if she's always tapping into an unseen dimension, force, or wavelength.

For audiences, it's a face – and an accompanying performance – that instantly elevates any project on the big or small screen: Mary Brady in 1992's *Sleepwalkers*, the Borg Queen in 1996's *Star Trek: First Contact*, the evil priestess Christabella in 2006's *Silent Hill*, Holda the witch in 2020's *Gretel & Hansel*, and, more recently, the ill-fated orphanage caretaker in 2022's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. How many faces, after all, can claim to be *the* face of Leatherface?

But for *Krige* herself, it's a face she only sees under duress. "If I'm being interviewed, I'll watch [my performances]," the 68-year-old actor tells *Rue*

*Morgue*, "but I don't enjoy it at all. All I am able to see is what I didn't accomplish."

Krige grew up in a family of serious servitude to others – her father was a physician for small rural communities in the Kalahari Desert in South Africa. When the family moved to Johannesburg, her mother became a psychologist, a vocation that inspired Krige's early education at Rhodes University. After taking her first acting class while trying to fill an open spot in her psychology studies, she fell in love with it, much to her parents' horror. But to Krige, acting was "the same terrain from the other end of the telescope" as psychology, and she moved from South Africa to London, England, to pursue classical theatre in the Central School of Speech and Drama. She's still based in London today, where she lives with her husband, filmmaker and dramatist Paul Schoolman (they met on the set of 1981's Oscar-winning *Chariots of Fire*, Krige's film debut). For every role, she is compelled to bring a disciplined, studied, convincing gravity to whatever being she's



FROM THE TRAGIC TO  
THE SARCASTIC TO THE  
UTTERLY GRUESOME, WE  
HEREBY PRESENT...

## THE MANY DEATHS OF ALICE KRIGE

BY  
CARLY MAGA

### GHOST STORY

(1981, Dir. John Irvin)

In her breakout role in the horror genre, Krige plays Eva, a young woman whose flirtations draw the attention – and jealousy – of four young men in 1929. After a night of drinking and dancing and a failed sexual encounter, one man's temper boils over and he hurls Eva into a stone fireplace. The story doesn't end there – the real horror arrives when she wakes up in the car the men have plunged into a nearby lake. The last they see of Eva is her screaming and banging on the car window as it sinks into the depths... that is, until her spirit returns to seek revenge on the men and their sons 50 years later.

### SLEEPWALKERS

(1992, Dir. Mick Garris)

Krige's memorable turn as Mary Brady, a shape-shifting werecat vampire who feeds on female virgins in cahoots with her Sleepwalker son (and lover) Charles (Brian Krause), has an equally unforgettable demise. After Charles' death, Mary pursues her teenage prey right into a Sleepwalker's only weakness: a horde of waiting housecats. Led by the trusty police cat avenging the death of his beloved sheriff, the felines tear into Mary in her natural werecat state until she bursts into flames and collapses, in human form, burning on her own suburban driveway. Apparently, some cats only have one life!



### STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT

(1996, Dir. Jonathan Frakes)

Though several people have played the Borg Queen, Krige's is the original and definitive portrayal. As the mouthpiece and leader of the semi-mech Borg collective, it looks like her plan to fully assimilate Earth has succeeded. That is until Data (Brent Spiner) outsmarts her, unleashing a flood of the Enterprise's warp core plasma coolant to dissolve what remains of her organic compo-



*Alice, Sweet Alice: With a track record as diverse as her talent, Alice Krige's many portrayals as a monstrous feminine villain have secured her place in horror history.*

portraying – even though that often requires what Krige calls “looking straight into the void” or “the abyss” – confronting the darkest parts of humanity to understand someone who can burn women and children alive, suck out the life force of virgins, or turn all of Earth into a human-robot hive mind.

“I’m endlessly interested in the human psyche and the human spirit and the human condition,” she says. “The great lesson of having spent 42 years doing this is to not judge. Who am I to judge anyone that is perceived as a villain? I don’t know if so-called villains experience themselves as villainous. I just see what they need and what they want and where their vulnerabilities and their frailties are and try as best I can to inhabit that.”

That approach remains steadfast no matter what vein of horror she lands in. In fact, it has allowed her to explore many different facets of the genre throughout her career – from the modern slasher *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, to the art house psychological horror of *Gretel & Hansel*, to the 1940s-inspired slow burn of *Ghost Story*, to the sci-fi lore of *Star Trek* and, well, whatever *Sleepwalkers* is. That bonkers creation by Stephen King and directed by Mick

Garris was Krige's next biggest genre appearance, starring as Mary Brady, a vampiric werecat who lives off the life force of human female virgins, has an incestuous relationship with her son Charles (Brian Krause), and whose mortal enemy is the common housecat. Even with such a ridiculous premise, Krige's performance never winks. In fact, of all things, she relied on her classical training and two years at London's Royal Shakespeare Company to pull it off.

“When I finally understood that, actually, [*Sleepwalkers*] was a satire on the genre and that Stephen King was having fun, I just thought, well then, she can be Shakespearean, she can be a tragic figure of that dimension,” she says. “They were beings that lived in a different dimension, and she was having to draw her sustenance out of this dimension, which had a whole different set of mores and morality. That’s a tragic situation. So, you just got to take a hold of that and go for it.”

To Krige, the parallels between horror and classical theatre aren't that far-fetched. She's part of a long history of character actors who have moved from the stage into genre films, which goes back to Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Peter





**“CHRISTABELLA WAS WAY DARKER THAN I EVER, EVER IMAGINED. IT WAS A VERY DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE.”**

— ALICE KRIGE

Cushing, and Vincent Price, and extends to contemporary talents like Colm Feore, Julian Richings, Robert Englund, and Toni Collette.

“Like in [Shakespeare’s] *Coriolanus*, or the Scottish play, you look into the abyss, the absolute darkest aspects of the human condition,” she says. “What that enables you to do, whether it’s in theatre or the horror genre, is to paint in the broadest strokes and more intense colours than if you try to reproduce life that’s less on the edge. That’s the edge of good horror that sends you reeling back, not just laughing because someone’s head’s been hacked off, but horror that takes your breath away and makes you reassess being alive.”

And sometimes, even for the most practiced actor, that’s a dangerous place to be. Throughout her career, there has been one character she regrets getting too close to: Christabella in Christophe Gans’ 2006 *Silent Hill* film adaptation. The final two weeks of film-

ing were composed entirely of scenes in which Christabella orchestrates several ritual burnings of women and a young victim of abuse, Alessa, whose anger starts the curse of Silent Hill. When the shoot was over, Krige says the character followed her home.

“The thing is, when you say yes, you can’t stop halfway,” she reveals. “Christabella was way darker than I ever, ever imagined. It was a very difficult experience. I would go back to my hotel room and I would think ‘I’ve got to meditate or do yoga or shift myself out of this space somehow.’ But I was always too tired. So I spent two weeks in that space.”

So powerful was her hold on the character, or vice versa, that even her dog was frightened.

“The day they brought me home from the airport, [my dog] Skipper was sitting at the gate and she was doing this full-body wag,” she recounts. “I walked up to the gate, and Skipper stopped

nents. To seal the deal, Captain Picard (Patrick Stewart) snaps her electronic spine. But this sordid scene hasn’t deterred further continuations of *Star Trek* from bringing the Queen back into the story (sometimes inviting Krige to reprise her most famous role). As Krige herself puts it, “I think it is a very, very arrogant, and misguided assumption to think you can kill the Borg Queen. You quite simply can’t.”



### **SILENT HILL**

**(2006, Dir. Christophe Gans)**

The scariest person in horror’s scariest town, the high priestess of the Brethren in *Silent Hill*, Christabella, is Krige’s darkest role, and her death is nothing short of a literal journey into hell. Once Rose (Radha Mitchell) brings the demonic Dark Alessa (Jodelle Ferland) into the church sanctuary, the real Alessa, incinerated in her hospital bed, rises through the floor. Hundreds of barbed wire tentacles emerge from the bed to pick off each member of the Brethren – but pay special attention to Christabella, the person responsible for burning Alessa alive and cursing the town three decades earlier. Raising Christabella into the air by the wrists and feet, the wires tear her apart from the inside out, showering Dark Alessa in blood and entrails below. Nightmare fuel.



### **TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**

**(2022, Dir. David Blue Garcia)**

This might be the most low-key death on this list, but Krige’s, let’s say, “presence” continues long past her character’s demise. Krige is Mrs. MC, an old woman living in a dilapidated former orphanage in the abandoned town of Harlow, which is about to be sold to become a self-contained society of Gen Z entrepreneurs, activists, and content creators (?). Mrs. MC has a heart attack when the police arrive to evict her and her suspiciously Leatherface-like silent “son” (Mark Burnham). When she passes away in the ambulance, the Leatherface we know and love is unleashed – and in a final act of violence (or perversity), he lovingly removes Krige’s distinctive visage and dons it atop his own. What an honour. 🧐



# NIGHTMARE DREAMS

## SHE WILL

Starring Malcolm McDowell, Alice Krige  
and Rupert Everett

Directed by Charlotte Colbert

Written by Kitty Percy and Charlotte Colbert  
IFC Films

"I don't do groups," announces Veronica Ghent (Alice Krige), aghast at the large welcome she receives upon arriving at a secluded resort in the Scottish wilderness, which is enough to immediately endear her to any viewer despite her taciturn attitude. You can't blame her – Ghent, a former film star, is looking for solitude as she recovers from a double mastectomy, not unsolicited praise for her past glory days. Even her nurse Desi (Kota Eberhardt) is barely tolerated.

But *She Will*, the feature debut of director and co-writer Charlotte Colbert and executive produced by Dario Argento, explores how Veronica's new Glaswegian surroundings unexpectedly aide in her therapy – emotional as well as physical – in atmospheric eeriness. Veronica begins to have visions of women persecuted for witchcraft in the area, and in her dreams, she visits the man who caused her great trauma as a child (Malcolm McDowell). She loses her fur coat and perfect hair and red lips and aloof demeanour – and starts sleepwalking in the woods, digging into the earth, embracing her new body, and opening up to Desi. Propelled by Colbert's darkly romantic portrayal of the land, with lingering shots of insects, shrubs, murky water, decaying plants and a recurring theme of flowing mud, *She Will* achieves the vibe it's going for – celebrating both the beauty and horror necessary to nature, trauma, and the healing process.

As a whole, the film is weighted by an abundance of ideas, a few incomprehensible character choices, and a plot that's too on-the-nose



– especially compared to its gorgeously surreal images and sound. But *She Will* is evidence of a new psycho-horror dream team: Colbert's camera elevates and celebrates a stirring performance from Krige, and vice versa. Together, Veronica's growth avoids cliché or self-consciousness – it simply unfolds, letting logic and contriteness go, as if they're both welcoming you into Veronica's dreams with her.

CARLY MAGA



**Bearing Ill Will:** Krige's latest horror role casts her as a complex and tortured former child star in Charlotte Colbert's *She Will*.

wagging. She looked at me, and she backed off, and she would have nothing to do with me for the three weeks that I was home. It's the only time that's happened, that the character was such a potent energy that it didn't get left behind. I really do wish it wasn't out there."

Strong words from a woman who has portrayed some of the most memorable female villains the genre has ever seen. Krige's iconic portrayal (and rotting face) traumatised an entire generation with her depiction of Eva/Alma in 1981's *Ghost Story* directed by John Irvin, based on the novel by Peter Straub. Her first venture into horror (and her second feature ever) at 25 years old, saw Krige surrounded by Hollywood legends: Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., John Houseman, and Patricia Neal. But even then, she was the standout performer among the greats as Eva Galli – a flirtatious and mysterious young woman who meets a horrifying end – and Alma – Eva's spirit who haunts the men who killed her, driving many of them to their deaths. However, as terrifying as she is as the femme fatale-turned-rotting corpse, to

Krige, she was never the evil one.

"She's not the villain at all," Krige once told *Daily Dead*. "If she's anything, she's the victim. When I was offered the role, it was an extraordinary challenge to play reincarnations of the same soul, as it were, but it's immensely sad. She was not looking for what happened to her, but that she should come back to seek vengeance is heart-breaking, but totally understandable."

Her first horror film is a perfect foil for her latest – *She Will*, the feature debut by director Charlotte Colbert, who also co-wrote the script, won the Golden Leopard for Best First Feature at the 2021 Locarno Film Festival. Krige stars as Veronica Ghent, an actress who is recovering from a double mastectomy in a small cabin in the Scottish wilderness with an aide, Desi (Kota Eberhardt), by her side. At first, Veronica is quaffed, closed off, and cold, even to Desi and especially to the other guests at the compound (spearheaded by Rupert Everett as a verbose concierge). But as her healing progresses, a surreal bond forms between Veronica, the lush forest land, and the women who were persecuted for witchcraft there centuries



**“THAT’S THE EDGE OF GOOD HORROR THAT SENDS YOU REELING BACK, NOT JUST LAUGHING BECAUSE SOMEONE’S HEAD’S BEEN HACKED OFF, BUT HORROR THAT TAKES YOUR BREATH AWAY AND MAKES YOU REASSESS BEING ALIVE.”**

**— ALICE KRIGE**



ago.

Eventually, in their isolation, Veronica and Desi find strength and solace in each other. And in her dreams, Veronica confronts a long-buried trauma sustained while filming her acting debut at thirteen years old, just as her abuser, the now esteemed “provocateur” director Eric Hathbourne (Malcolm McDowell), is casting another young actress to star in the remake.

“Alma certainly is experienced as a vengeful spirit,” says Krige. “For me, Veronica is not so much vengeful, but demanding the truth be told... She wanted him to tell the truth and not to replay that story. And that’s a vast improvement. I’m not this avenging, malign spirit that’s come back to kill you all. I just want you to be honest.”

Despite being drawn to roles that dance on the edge of violence and despair, Krige mostly recalls her parts in soft, sympathetic tones. In reality, she is gentle, thoughtful, smiley, and quick to make a joke. She’s not a natural-born horror lover – in fact, she left South Africa just as TV was becoming mainstream and she only saw *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Davy Crockett* in cinemas as a child. Both times she asked her mother to leave when they got too violent. Not all her roles have gone the darker route, but in horror, a happy ending has been hard to find for the characters she builds so caringly and carefully. And with *She Will*, Krige is clearly enjoying the opportunity.

“I loved that the younger woman gave the older woman another chance at being human, at being vulnerable, at being open to affection,” she says. “I haven’t actually seen it in any other story, and for me, that’s what you are left with in the end. It was a very rich and life-affirming experience.”

Even before *She Will* has reached a wide audience outside of the festival circuit, Krige is aware of its potential reception in the horror community. She likens it to Oz Perkins’ 2020 feature *Gretel & Hansel* and her character of Holda, a child-eating witch luring young Gretel (Sophia Lillis) to turn on her brother.

“I think it’s rather a beautiful movie,” she says. “Holda’s journey is so torturous because she’s made a choice that’s destroyed her, essentially. But many of the reviewers said, ‘But it’s not scary. Where is the horror?’ But it wasn’t a horror movie. It was, like *She Will*, a psychological drama with elements of looking down into the abyss, which is the horror element, for me anyway. Horror is a very big label, isn’t it? I very much hope that people who see it don’t go expecting to see *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.”

The more credits Krige adds to her acting resume, the more she’s expanding beyond it. She is now writing and producing several of the films she appears in, like the upcoming *Shingetsu*, the second in a trilogy of films co-created with Schoolman and actor Gunter Singer. She has two

more films underway, titled *Three Widows* and another tentatively titled *Naked Abuse*.

Ever the perfectionist, she’s also still trying to improve her acting. Strangely enough, she’s even getting closer to being able to enjoy watching herself on the big screen. In *She Will*, she admits, there was one moment she didn’t hate.

“I thought, ‘Well, thank God I wasn’t trying too hard,’” she says with a laugh. “I suppose the longer I’ve worked, I try to think less. I do the research and the exploration to the same level of intensity as I’ve ever done but, increasingly, I seek to stop thinking once I’ve begun, to simply be in the moment. And, curiously, that is also something I’m learning to do in life. They’re both equally as hard.”

In another time, or in another storyteller’s hands, Veronica has the makings of a typical wicked witch: a reclusive and angry woman, bereft of physical symbols of sexuality and youthfulness, magically appearing to her enemy like a waking nightmare. But Krige’s performance gives Veronica a sense of whimsy and sincerity, even as she wades into painful, even sinful, territory. Colbert’s direction (and her script, co-written by Kitty Percy) makes it abundantly clear that this is her story, and it’s dark, sensitive, eerie, and hopeful all at once. Finally, it seems, the horror genre is ready for female villains that are as complex as they’ve always been to their performer. 🧛



UK-BASED HORRIFY ME WANTS TO TRANSFORM YOU  
INTO THE STUFF OF YOUR WILDEST NIGHTMARES

# HORRIFY ME

BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

**I**F YOU'RE READING THIS MAGAZINE, THEN CHANCES ARE YOU'VE DONNED A LOT OF MONSTER COSTUMES THROUGHOUT YOUR LIFE. Few will ever star in a horror movie, but that doesn't mean you can't look like you did. That's what UK-based photographer Rick Jones and his Horrify Me photo/makeup studio have aimed to do since 2014.

His sole objective: make horror fans' dreams come true while making *them* the stuff of nightmares. His latest book, *Horror Portraits*, is a lavish pictorial testament to his art and craft, with high praise from a man who would know, Tom Savini, who states in his introduction that "this book should be a reference on every makeup artist's shelf."

What Savini is referring to is the detailed monster







makeup on offer at [Horrify Me](#), for classic vampire, zombie, and demon shoots (for up to four people), along with film-specific portraiture available for commission, should one dare to conjure the iconic looks of Carrie White, Regan/Pazuzu or Samara from *The Ring*. There's even a horror wedding package.

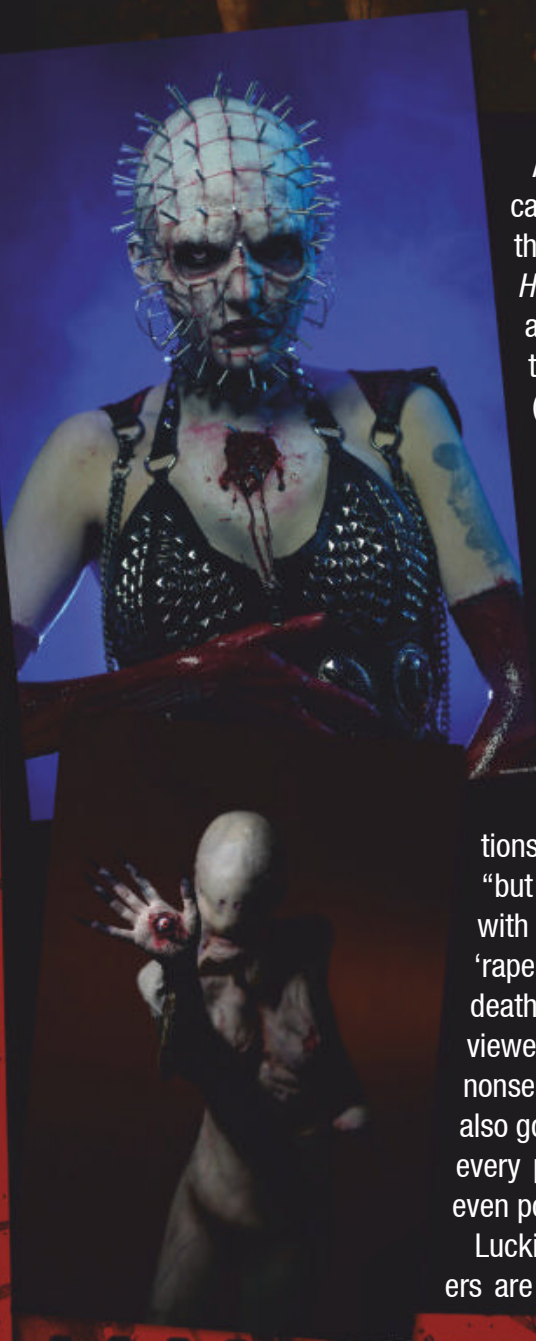
"Lots of people think working in film is the highest point you can reach in the [makeup FX] arts but I don't share that view," Jones tells *Rue Morgue*. "For me, the highest point in any creative endeavour is the point at which you find your ultimate satisfaction and happiness with it. I just love being a horror photographer."

Although Jones has garnered enough cred for his craft – including the National Photography Award for Creative Image, a Scare Industry Scars Award, and Alt

Fashion Photographer of the Year – his kind of photography comes with its share of detractors. Jones recalls an incident where one of his images wound up being shared in a social media debate about the appropriateness of using blood and gore when dressing little kids as zombies for Halloween. The image showed a six-year-old zombie child holding up his mother's decapitated head, and the backlash was swift and severe.

"Their complaints and insults got pretty bad," he recalls, "with some even suggesting I should have my hard drives checked by authorities for other 'disgusting photos of children.' What they didn't know was that the little kid is the son of my best buddy Darren – he loves horror films, and he and his mother had a blast shooting that photo."





Another Horrify Me original that caused a stir was Jones' tribute to the classic shocker film *Cannibal Holocaust* and the iconic image of an impaled girl. Using the same technique that the movie did (where a nude model is sitting on a bike seat mounted on a wooden pole), Jones faced some nasty criticism for it that was not unlike the criticism faced by filmmaker Ruggero Deodato, who was arrested on obscenity charges back in 1980.

"On the one hand, the photo was hugely popular, getting attention in several publications and fan groups," says Jones, "but it also attracted a lot of anger, with awful words thrown around like 'rape' and 'misogyny.' I even got a death threat from some anonymous viewer over it, but I don't take that nonsense seriously. This image has also gotten me banned from just about every platform at some stage. I can't even post it heavily censored."

Luckily, that notorious photo and others are now widely available in *Horror*

*Portraits*, and from several angles. The 288-page hardcover art book also contains Jones' favourite shots of the past few years, ranging from the graphic to the gory, the scary to the sensual, and always spattered in blood.

For all the moral outrage, Jones isn't hurting for clients ready and willing to transform themselves into monsters and have the image captured for posterity. In fact, people travel from all over the world to his little corner of the UK just to have their portraits taken at Horrify Me and that doesn't seem likely to change.

"Very few of [my clients] are what you might call weird or unusual in any way," says Jones. "Most are just normal everyday working folk who want a weird day out, or who love horror films and want to participate in the creative aspects of the genre. It's always incredibly fascinating and revealing to see the wild personality changes that happen to normal people once they find their inner horror characters in front of my camera." 🧐





# THE GHASTLY ONES

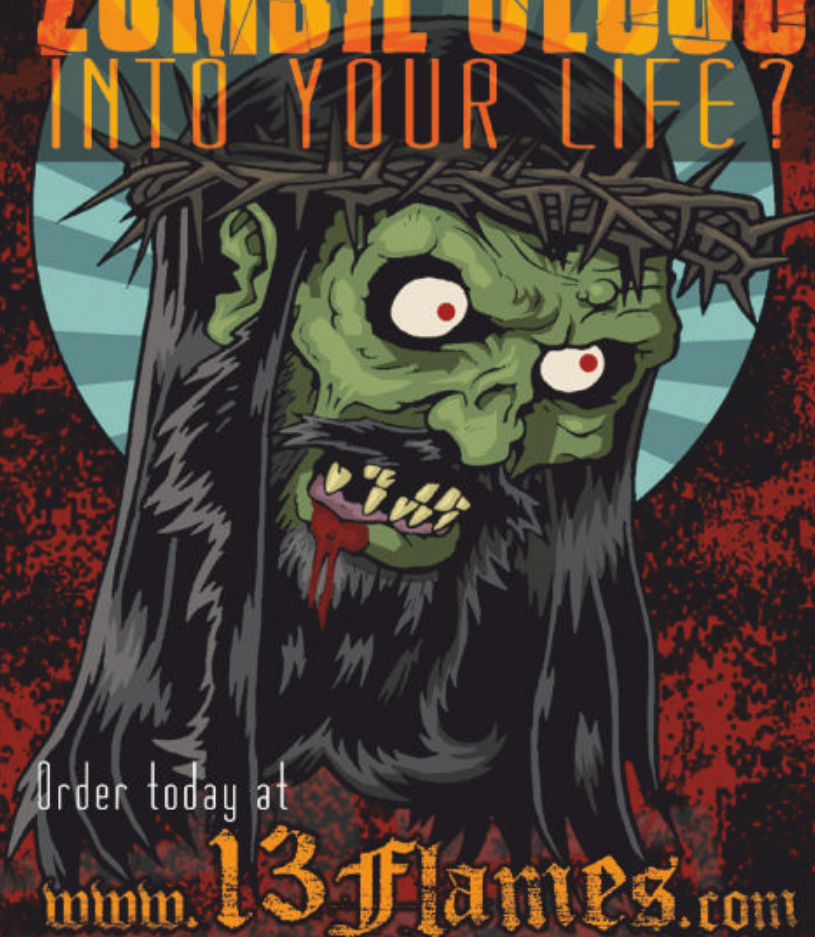


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THE RECORD-BREAKING TV SERIES SHAMBLES ITS WAY TO  
NEW YORK'S MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE FOR  
LIVING WITH THE WALKING DEAD

EXHIBIT:

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

**W**ITH THE FINAL SEASON OF AMC'S *THE WALKING DEAD* NOW CONCLUDED, next year's spinoff series *Isle of the Dead* is poised to see Lauren Cohan's Maggie and Jeffrey Dean Morgan's Negan explore a zombie-plagued Manhattan – but that's not the only venue where you'll find ghouls invading New York City. At Astoria, Queens' Museum of the Moving Image, the extensive "*Living With The Walking Dead*" exhibition has just opened, and will be terrifying visitors through to the end of the year. And according to Barbara Miller, MoMI's deputy director for curatorial affairs who is overseeing the exhibition, the fright factor is just one aspect of the series that is being celebrated.

"I'm a fan of the show and the worlds it created and the amazing makeups by [Greg Nicotero](#) and his team," she says. "It seemed like fertile territory to explore how, when these zombie/post-apocalyptic narratives found a home in the television medium, all of these avenues for storytelling became possible, and where it went from there."

With the flagship *Walking Dead* series coming to a close, even though some characters will continue to live on in various spinoffs, Miller says it made sense to take stock of the original series' legacy and explore the new terrain it has charted. The exhibit will also be paying appropriate honour to Robert Kirkman's comics given that the story and ideas first came out of his head.

"Robert has said very often that *The Walking Dead* is a zombie show that doesn't end," notes Miller. "Most movies and stories about the undead apocalypse are framed as a hero or heroine's journey – a search for a cure, looking for answers, wrapping up how we get out of it or why it happened to begin with. We were really taken with the series' idea of what happens next."



We felt that was a very interesting way to discuss the show's legacy, and put it within the context of what came before."

To that end, Miller and company are also including posters and materials from early zombie films, from George A. Romero and others, to re-examine *The Walking Dead* as "providing a broad canvas for examining how people rebuild their lives and learn to live in this space with the undead in an environment where all social ties have been severed, and how we remake ourselves, find things out about ourselves that we had never realized we were capable of – both good and bad – and rebuild our relationships."

MoMI previously hosted major AMC presentations dealing with hits *Breaking Bad* in 2013 and *Mad Men* two years later, so "Living With The Walking Dead" came together quite easily. Miller and her staff worked closely with the show's current creative team.

"They've been very generous with their time, offering their insights and their material," she says. "We probably worked most closely with Greg Nicotero and his team at KNB EFX, who provided us with a lot of groovy makeup material; you'll see plenty of cool zombie stuff. We've also got costumes and other materials from some of the key characters."

Included are outfits worn by Rick, Michonne, Carol, Daryl, Jadis, Alpha, Negan, Gabriel, and Morgan, and a wide variety of weapons (yes, the lethal "Lucille" is on view – specifically one equipped with a blood reservoir). Among the prosthetics displayed at the exhibition are three busts illustrating the creation of the iconic "Bicycle Girl" half-zombie from the first episode, along with concept art and storyboards; a bust of the second season's bloated "well walker," with concept art; a figure of kneeling Glenn with the prosthetic wound from his seventh-season demise; and remote-control and prop heads for Enid, Tara, Henry, Herschel, Alpha, and others.

"We also look specifically at the characters' story arcs," Miller says, "so it's not just like, here's all the cool hero props! We have a lot of those, for sure, but the focus is really on how these people changed over the course of the show. That's the kernel of our thesis in the exhibition: that there's a long view afforded by an eleven-season television series that allows you insight into the human condition."

Beyond the props, prosthetics, memorabilia, etc. "Living With The Walking Dead" also incorporates screenings of various undead flicks (and possibly full episodes of the series, which hadn't been confirmed as of presstime). There will also be public programs and remote interviews with scholars, fans, and others, and the exhibition is also being engaged in MoMI's online publications and presences. Speaking of the fans, part of "Living" focuses on the enormous following *The Walking Dead* engendered over the course of its run, and how the sense of community crucial to the show's ongoing narrative became re-



**The Dead Walk:** "If you're going to an exhibition about *The Walking Dead*, you're going to expect to see some walking dead creatures," says Museum of the Moving Image curator Barbara Miller.

flected in its fandom.

And while the series itself is certainly not suitable for younger viewers, Miller says that "Living With The Walking Dead" is an all-ages exhibition. She does acknowledge that the show won't be to everyone's taste, adding, "if you're going to an exhibition about *The Walking Dead*, you're going to expect to see some walking dead creatures! We're not creating a scary funhouse – you are in a museum, so hopefully it won't be too terrifying – but if you're someone who scares easily at the thought of the undead, you should probably go to another one of our galleries while your friends visit 'Living With The Walking Dead.'"

On the other hand, she concludes, you don't have to be familiar with *The Walking Dead* to appreciate what the exhibition has to offer.

"Even if you've never seen the show, or you don't think you're interested in it, I still believe 'Living' will engage any museum-goer, because it's not limiting its appeal just to the fans. As in everything we do at MoMI, we've tried to bring the broadest possible audience to what we're

presenting here. For sure, it's a celebration, and fans will be able to find what they expect to see, but I think anyone can enjoy looking at the amazing prosthetics, and appreciate the idea of characters remaking their lives under the most extraordinary circumstances, and then how this show's narratives relate to previous explorations of those ideas. There's enough historical context here that you won't really need to know anything about *The Walking Dead* before coming to see it."

And it doesn't take a horror fan to recognize that *The Walking Dead* has certainly gained some additional relevance over the past couple of years, for obvious reasons. While Miller maintains that the series resonates much deeper than the current context, she admits that it feels especially timely in 2022.

"We would have done this exhibition regardless, and we haven't put any particular pandemic framework around it. But inevitably, it has those resonances – can't help that!" 🧟



# CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES

## TRAUMA BOMB

### WHEN I CONSUME YOU

Starring Libby Ewing, Evan Dumouchel and MacLeod Andrews  
Written and directed by Perry Blackshear  
Yellow Veil Pictures

The ongoing consequences of childhood trauma – and how to live with it – are explored to emotional effect in writer/director Perry Blackshear's heartfelt horror drama *When I Consume You*.

This low-budget but highly intelligent effort from the director behind 2015's acclaimed *They Look Like People* stars that film's Evan Dumouchel as Wilson, a troubled Brooklynite whose bond with his sister Daphne (Libby Ewing) is probably the only thing giving his disordered life some semblance of order. So, when Daphne dies, apparently from a drug overdose, despite being clean for the last five years, he can't accept the fact and instead blames it on the mysterious stranger he sees leaving her apartment. Complicating mat-

ters further is Daphne, whose ghost returns to help her weakling brother take on what they call The Stalker.

Now, that plot description sounds admittedly ridiculous. But, while accurate, it only partly describes what is actually going on in *When I Consume You*. Because this is an acutely disturbing but ultimately hopeful meditation on grief, trauma, and what it takes to live with, if not defeat, your demons.



Blackshear, who also edited the film, carefully deploys flashbacks into the narrative that land like emotional hand grenades. These, when they finally explode, upend our understanding of what we thought was going on. It's an impactful technique that not only helps tell the story in a clever way but which provides a big emotional charge in what is otherwise a study in minimalism. Indeed, Blackshear trusts us to figure out what's happening without laying it all out in linear fashion. The end result is a time bomb of a horror film whose devastating impact doesn't come from visceral shocks but emotional ones.

SEAN PLUMMER

## MAD GOD CONFESSIONAL STALL

### GLORIOUS

Starring Ryan Kwanten and J.K. Simmons  
Directed by Rebekah McKendry  
Written by Joshua Hull, David Ian McKendry and Todd Rigney  
Alliance Media Partners/Fallback Plan

Imagine Sookie Stackhouse's hunky brother (Ryan Kwanten) recovering from a bender following a bad break-up and stuck for nearly 79 minutes in a backwoods rest stop with a disembodied voice (belonging to J.K. Simmons) that hides in a bathroom stall and says it's a god called Ghat (for short), and you'll start to get some idea of just how truly strange *Glorious* is.

It all begins with Wes (Kwanten) pulling into the rest stop to scream at the teddy bear his former girlfriend gave him. Attempting to rid himself of thoughts of his ex, Wes downs a bottle of whiskey as he burns everything that reminds him of her. After passing out, he awakens with a hefty case of alcohol poisoning, runs to the men's room, loses his last three or four meals, and begins a conversation with





whomever – or whatever – is in the next stall. He soon realizes he's trapped in the bathroom and, as circumstances unwind (with blood) is forced to accept Ghat's godhood. And the god, of course (like all gods), demands a sacrifice...

With its small cast (the film has a grand total of five speaking parts, although one of those – the god – is performed entirely in voice-over) and two locations (inside and outside the rest stop), *Glorious* sometimes feels like a stage play, but it overcomes that limitation with moderate doses of absurdist humour and gore, all considerably aided by Rebekah McKendry's stylish direction.

Kwanten is terrific as Wes, but it would be wrong to call this a one-man show because J.K. Simmons is one of those rare actors who can steal a movie without ever even being seen in it.

If you're looking for something outside of your run-of-the-mill horror flick, *Glorious* just may scratch that cosmic itch.

LISA MORTON

## FROM THE PAST, DARKLY

### RESURRECTION

Starring Rebecca Hall, Tim Roth and Grace Kaufman  
Written and directed by Andrew Semans  
IFC Films

Hot on the heels of David Bruckner's critical and audience darling *The Night House*, Rebecca Hall returns with another barnburner of a performance in Andrew Semans' Sundance Film Festival premiere, *Resurrection* – a psychological horror story rendered in strokes of Cronenberg and Haneke that drips with the clinging, ghostly afterbirth of New French Extremity.

Margaret (Hall) is a high-powered executive living with her soon-to-be eighteen-year-old daughter Abbie (Grace Kaufman) in a chic apartment in a nameless grey city. Disciplined to a fault and detesting of weakness, Margaret

lives a regimented life of labour and physical fitness, her only indulgence being casual sex with Peter (Michael Esper), a married man from her office. But Margaret's veneer of hard stabil-

ity cracks when she glimpses David (Tim Roth) from afar. A mysterious stranger from her past, Margaret is immediately convinced that David is back with nefarious intent, and as her carefulness curdles into obsession, Margaret risks losing her daughter, her mind, and the life she's worked so hard to build.

Semans' slippery, diabolically alluring script would be a treat for any actor, but the film's core team makes a feast of it. Hall is captivating, as always, as a single-minded woman coming apart at the seams and Roth beautifully underplays his Keith Raniere-like charismatic abuser – the two engaging in a breathtaking pas de deux of phrenic destruction. By the climax, when *Resurrection*'s troubling mystery collapses into a sickening, ambiguous end, one may wish the film's physical ravages were as visceral or affecting as its emotional ones. But if Semans doesn't quite deliver on the promise of body horror, the psychic bruising he and his fearless actors put audiences through will continue to smart long after the credits roll.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON

## HOME ON THE STRANGE

### WHAT JOSIAH SAW

Starring Robert Patrick, Scott Haze and Nick Stahl  
Directed by Vincent Grashaw  
Written by Robert Alan Dilts  
Randomix Productions

From Vincent Grashaw, director of 2013's *Coldwater* and 2017's *And Then I Go*, comes *What Josiah Saw*, a part-time horror thriller,

part-time western, penned by Robert Alan Dilts. Starring *Terminator 2*'s Robert Patrick and *Terminator 3*'s Nick Stahl, the film consists of three tonally different beats, each following one of three siblings in the Graham family, whose past familial struggles lie at the heart of the narrative, as an oil company looks to buy their land.

Patrick and Scott Haze helm the first scenario, collaboratively building a haunted house segment. The grimy, desaturated colour palette lets the audience know they're in the Deep South long before the accents do, and the family home fits right in among the old farmhouses of the genre. The second segment is centred on Stahl's quest for gypsy gold and dives head-first into the setting's western roots, feeling more like *No Country for Old Men* than *The Dark and the Wicked*. The final segment focuses on Mary Milner's (Kelli Garner) domestic issues and ties the first sections of the story together.

Each part of the story stands well enough on its own, but watching them in sequence feels a bit jarring, jumping from atmosphere to atmosphere. At two hours long, I wonder if the piece would have benefitted from running as a three-episode limited series. The performances are all more than serviceable, particularly a magazine reading sequence shared between Patrick





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## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

### THIS ISSUE: LANCE LOSES HIS PATIENTS

MIKE AND ALFFIE



#### PATIENT SEVEN

Terror Films

I'm not a very good patient. I don't mind needles or the sight of blood, but I'm at that age where doctors always seem to want to probe my rectal cavity – and that includes my shrink. Which is why my sympathies were high when I sat down with *Patient Seven*, a tight little horror anthology where a psychiatrist – played masterfully by Canuck genre royalty Michael Ironside – is interviewing a series of patients at the Spring Valley Mental Institution in an effort to discover the nature of their psychosis. What ensues are tales about zombies, serial killers, ghosts, vampires and demons – proof positive that Spring Valley is populated by aspiring horror movie scribes. Predictably, *Patient Seven* delivers blood, some inspiring kills, and a delightful cameo by Alfie Allen who played Theon Greyjoy in *Game of Thrones*. With tales from around Iceland, the UK, and Sweden, I recommend you gorehounds out there give this number a last chance... or my name ain't Lance.

**BODY COUNT:** 26

**BEST DRINKING GAME:** A shot every time someone gets a shot

#### THE DEAD TALK



#### PATIENT ZERO

Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

The walking dead have been trotted out to the end of time so I didn't exactly hold high hopes that this outing would resurrect my interest in yet another apocalyptic zombie tale – but, boy, was I wrong. Set in the near future, where a particularly nasty strain of rabies has infected most of humanity, *Patient Zero* follows a group of soldiers and scientists trying desperately to locate a cure before everyone gets infected and/or munched upon. Enter Morgan, a guy working with the military who was bitten but survived, and who can now speak a language that only the infected can understand. Played masterfully by Matt (Doctor Who) Smith and featuring a stellar supporting cast, *Patient Zero* is filled with great kills and a killer classic rock soundtrack. Wannabe zombie film directors take note!

**BODY COUNT:** 40

**BEST DRINKING GAME:** A shot every time a zombie screams

#### SEND... MORE... PARAMEDICS



#### PATIENT 79

ITN Distribution

I guess it would've been just too much to ask to have three amazing films in this column – so here's the clunker of this trio for your cherished consideration. Also known as *Seventy-Nine*, *79th Patient*, and even *The Asylum*, this sick puppy is set in an abandoned mental institution where an off-the-books government organization is experimenting with different brainwashing techniques. After snatching patients off the streets, the cabal of questionable doctors and guards erase their memories and subject them to different forms of torture and deprivation. Though the plot sounds promising, *Patient 79* suffers from a slew of typical low-budget sins: a plodding script, ham-fisted camerawork, and a cast of forgettable actors who were probably paid in Skittles and meth. My shrink is looking for new patients if anyone is interested.

**BODY COUNT:** 6

**BEST DRINKING GAME:** A shot every time you see someone in orange restraints

LAST CHANCE LANCE

and Haze, and the piece is captured confidently by first-time feature shooter Carlos Ritter. The flat brown and grey colour palette has never really been my thing, but it does the job here. *What Josiah Saw* plays as a slow burn that detours briefly into western territory, but ultimately rewards the viewer for sticking around with a third act that ties everything neatly together.

RJ NADON

## CAPE TOWN SPECTRES

#### GOOD MADAM

Starring Chumisa Cosa, Nosipho Mtebe

and Kamvalethu Jonas Raziya

Directed by Jenna Cato Bass

Written by various

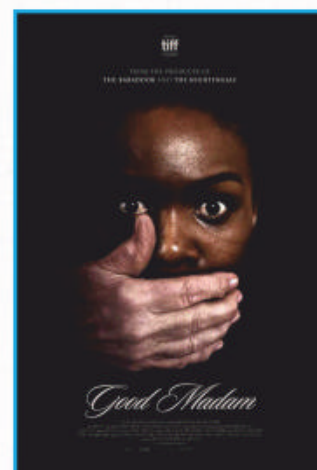
Shudder

"It's not that Mama doesn't like this house. But it seems this house doesn't like Mama." So says Tsidi (Chumisa Cosa) to her young daughter Winnie (Kamvalethu Jonas Raziya) as she tries to explain her discomfort in South Africa's *Good Madam* (a.k.a. *Mlungu Wam*), where the country's legacies of apartheid and colonialism linger alongside the ghosts.

After a family dispute forces them out of their home, Tsidi and Winnie find refuge in the palatial suburban Cape Town home where Tsidi's mother Mavis (Nosipho Mtebe) acts as a live-in caretaker for the mysterious, ailing Madam Diana. Tsidi worries that Mavis is being taken advantage of by her boss, forced to work so many hours that she missed her own mother's funeral. Mavis insists that Madam treats her well, and besides – where else can she go? She needs the job and the house. Omens and weird happenings begin to manifest, and soon all three generations become threatened by Madam's wishes.

There are echoes of genre classics such as *Get Out*, *Burnt Offerings*, and *The House of the Devil*, but for the bulk of its runtime *Good Madam* mostly feels like an engaging, vaguely sinister family drama. When the true horrors arrive in the final act, it satisfies even if it doesn't quite live up to the promise of all the preceding suspense-building. Still, the story of countless Black servants giving up their families, their lives, and maybe their souls in servitude is horrific enough and a story worth telling.

STACIE PONDER



## GENERATION WHY?

#### HYPOCHONDRIAC

Starring Zach Villa, Devon Graye and Madeline Zima

Written and directed by Addison Heimann

XYZ Films

Mental health struggles are as endemic to the millennial experience as anilingus and avocado toast, and Addison Heimann prominently features two points of





*The Reef: Stalked*

this Gen-Y triumvirate in his SXSW selection, *Hypochondriac*, a psychological thriller in dire need of psychological thrills.

Will (Zach Villa) is a young potter employed at an upscale gallery where he spends his days grooving to early 2010s dance-pop and helping his bestie (Yumarie Morales) avert panic attacks brought on by their shitty #girlboss, Blossom (Madeline Zima). With a stalwart, new-ish boyfriend (Devon Graye) and a steady job, things seem to be good for Will, until a voicemail from his estranged, paranoid schizophrenic mother (Marlene Forte) cracks his life wide open. Dogged by a dark entity in a wolf costume, Will begins circling the drain as the traumas of his past emerge to threaten the present.

*Hypochondriac* is clearly deeply personal to Heimann, and it's the smaller, lived-in specificities that make it worthwhile even when it falters; the film isn't shy about the intricacies of gay sex, is blatant in its disapproval of medical professionals who dismiss the concerns of their patients, and anyone whose parent has flirted with internet conspiracies brought on by the isolation of COVID-19 will feel a pang of recognition in Will's pain. In broader terms, however, *Hypochondriac* falls flat because of its familiarity. Heimann uses the obvious visual metaphor of a looming, costumed figure in the tradition of *Harvey* and *Donnie Darko* to represent his lead's mental state, but can't quite get his fingers into his gaping emotional wounds. Despite some disturbing material, *Hypochondriac* pulls too many punches,



walking the razor's edge between psychological thriller and message movie before tripping headlong into the latter.

ROCCO T. THOMPSON

## WATERS RUN RED

### THE REEF: STALKED

Starring *Teressa Liane, Saskia Archer and Ann Truong*  
Written and directed by *Andrew Traucki*  
RLJE Films

Australia is the land of countless things ready to kill you – spiders, snakes, that guy from *Wolf Creek*, cassowaries, whatever the fuck was going on in *Lake Mungo*, etc. – and it's a wonder anyone survives very long. The water surrounding Australia is, of course, just as deadly, home to venomous fish, snails, jellyfish, and horror's true boogeyman of the sea, the great white shark.

The gal pals of *The Reef: Stalked* are true tough Aussies though, keen for the dangers they regularly take on for kicks in a sort of “book club, but with fish and spear guns” as Jodie (Ann Truong) puts it. When one of the gals is murdered by her abusive boyfriend, the group splinters for months but reunites to embark on a multi-day, multi-island kayaking trek in tribute. Nic (Teressa Liane), still traumatized by her sister's murder, has to contend with her grief as well as her fractured relationship with her other sister Annie (Saskia Archer), but this family strife must be set aside when the kayakers find themselves stalked by a pissed-off, hungry shark.

Writer/director Andrew Traucki is familiar with

dangerous waters, having helmed both *Black Water* (2007) and *The Reef* (2010), and here he eschews the over-the-top CGI sharknigans that have dominated the subgenre for years to get back to the briny basics. You know what the basics are in a shark movie: shots of dorsal fins gliding through the sea, shots of vulnerable legs a-dangling and a-kicking, exciting string music, characters imploring one another to “swim faster,” close-ups of a shark's face as it breaches, and so on. But hey, those are the basics for good reason, right?

Though its scope and budget are small, the film certainly has its share of nail-biting sequences. But with its shades of *The Descent's* character-building, *The Reef: Stalked* is as focused – if not more focused – on the women in the kayaks as it is with the shark trying to eat them. Still, there's enough blood and sharp teeth to remind me why I prefer book clubs on land. With books.

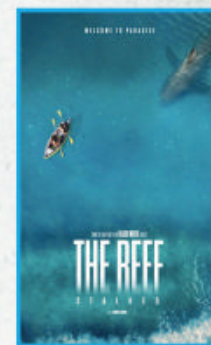
STACIE PONDER

## BIT OF A DRAG

### SO VAM

Starring *Xai, Grace Hyland and Chris Asimos*  
Directed by *Alice Maio Mackay*  
Written by *Alice Maio Mackay*  
and *Benjamin Pahl Robinson*  
Mutiny Pictures

*So Vam* is the feature-length debut of Aussie transgender teen director Alice Maio Mackay. Her numerous short films have struck close to





# SHORT CUTS

BITE-SIZED FRIGHTS  
FOR SMALL APPETITES

ON THE SLAB: MICRO-SHORTS, AMUSE-BOUCHES OF THREE MINUTES OR LESS

## THE MUFFIN MAN

2:15 mins/YouTube via the Dennis Media channel

Faux trailers are a hell of a way to pack a lot of elements into as tight a runtime as possible. In this case, director Ethan Blum bombards us with everything we love about campy grindhouse flicks as he sells us on a nonexistent movie about a maniacal baker who puts blood and... well, more blood into his recipes. Blum craftily uses the trailer format to lay on the sizzle nice and thick without having to worry about actually delivering a feature film that could never live up to the preview's promises. There's over-the-top gore, references to a slew of classic horror films, and even a government conspiracy that goes all the way up to the mayor's office. Everyone involved is clearly having a ball, and Blum has the talent to match the enthusiasm.

## SALT

2:03 minutes/Vimeo via Rob Savage's channel

If you're going to try to pull off a suspenseful short film in just over two minutes, you can't afford to waste a single frame. Director Rob (*Host*) Savage sieves out everything but the bare essentials in *Salt*, which sees a mother desperate enough to help her sick daughter that she's willing to face demonic entities that can only be repelled with salt circles. There's no time for exposition, and Savage throws in just enough context to help us keep up with the next shot. Anchoring it all is Alice (*Prevenge*) Lowe starring as the mom, who says more with a few phrases and body language than a lot of performers do with an entire script's worth of dialogue. This film will leave your heart racing and your breath gone in less time than it takes to make toast.



## REFLEX

2:55 minutes/YouTube via the Scremfest Channel

Short films often provide directors with an opportunity to tell an elaborate joke, and horror shorts provide a means to revel in gallows humour. Such is the case for Zulma Rouge's short about a man who spends his days working at a fish processing plant and coming home to a well-meaning but irritating partner. Rouge's expert editing and pacing convey the relentless repetition of the daily grind as our nameless protagonist lives out the same routine over and over. Boris Gillot nails the glazed stare of a man who checked out of his own life long ago, while Delphine Bronzi clearly has a ball chattering away in the film's weird gibberish. Rouge brings it all to a crazed crescendo that combines the man's work life and his home life in a morbidly hilarious punchline.

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

the young queer experience in Australia, and *So Vam* is no exception.

Kurt (Xai) is a frustrated queer high schooler who just wants to get out of his small town and away from the even smaller minds of the school's bullies. However, he quickly learns that the adult world is not all glitz and glam when he is attacked by a predatory vampire (Chris Asimos) while out in the nearby city one night. A kinder vampire (Grace Hyland) saves his life by turning Kurt into a vampire and teaching him her vampy methods of staying fed and exacting revenge.

The allegory for monstrous transformation is obvious in *So Vam*, keeping with the legacy of so many horror films before it that draw parallels between adolescent growing pains and becoming a beast of one kind or another. Just as *Ginger Snaps*, *Jennifer's Body*, and *Carrie* depict puberty through monstrosity, *So Vam* steps into queerness and dragdom through vampirism.

Even with that classic parable, *So Vam* suffers from some common mishaps that plague both first features and low-budget horror. The dialogue as written is commendable, but the ADR is prevalent to the point of distraction. Performances are uneven, and there are issues with the film's tempo, when the interesting plot is interrupted by awkward scenes or unnecessarily long drag performances.

Despite these operational hiccups, it is hard to overlook the fact that there is something exciting and interesting at the core of *So Vam*: an honest and refreshing affection for outsiders of the queer and/or monstrous varieties. Not to mention that mingling the razzle-dazzle of drag and vampires has never been a bad idea.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS



## HOLY CROCKAMOLEY

### WHERE THE SCARY THINGS ARE

Starring Paul Cottman, Michael Cervantes and Selina Flanscha  
Written and directed by B. Harrison Smith  
Lionsgate

When you set out to create your own urban legend, but that urban legend finds you, what do you do? Do you run? Scream? Or take that boogeyman hostage and wield him for social media "likes?" In *Where the Scary Things Are*, the boogeyman is real, but he might not be as terrifying as the teens who discover him.

The film concerns six angsty teenage "dockers" (*docking*, in this case, referring to the act of blackmailing fellow teens online; a possible relative to doxing?) working on a class project to create their own urban legend. Led by Ayla (Selina Flanscha), the group circulates rumours of the dreaded Lockjaw, a wayward creep who supposedly lurks around the local swamp ponds. But when a very real, very swampy boogeyman emerges from seemingly nowhere, the teens capture it at a horror amusement park. Dubbing the mutant humanoid swamp monster "Crockamoley," their social



POWERMAN 5000 FRONTMAN SPIDER ONE EXPLORES THE HELL OF CREATIVITY WITH ALLEGORIA, HIS FEATURE FILM DEBUT

# THE ART OF DEATH

BY ROCCO T. THOMPSON

**I** LIKEN BEING AN ARTIST TO BEING IN THE MOB," JOKES SPIDER ONE, THE WRITER/DIRECTOR/GENERAL MASTERMIND BEHIND THE UPCOMING SHUDDER ORIGINAL *Allegoria*. "There's a scene in *The Godfather: Part III* [where] Al Pacino's like, 'Every time I try to get out, they pull me back in,' and that's what it feels like to be a creative person: you can't not do it."

Such is the thrust behind the *Powerman 5000* lead singer's debut feature, which knits together a handful of horror tales about actors, writers, musicians, and painters into a tapestry of creative hell. His film's foundational message of being a slave to the creative process is echoed by famous self-mutilator Vincent van Gogh's final words in the pre-title card: "The sadness will last forever." But at the same time, Spider recognizes the absurdity of artistic pretension, which gives *Allegoria* the added colour of a light comic touch and slightly self-aware bent:

"It is hilarious to me that we torture ourselves over splatterings of paint on a canvas," he says. "There's nothing funnier than when people take what they do [too] seriously, and to find the ridiculousness in it all is important too."

*Allegoria* begins in a classroom ruled over by a raving acting coach (John Ennis) before moving through scenarios involving a painter (Bryce Johnson) consumed by his newest masterpiece, a screenwriter (Edward Hong) whose slasher script may be just a little *too* good, and a first date between a charismatic potter (Scout Compton) and her ineffectual conquest (Adam Busch). The film concludes with the story of a young actress (Krsy Fox) who might literally give up her soul for her art.

Not surprisingly, Spider reveals that the majority of these segments began as shorts.

"I created them over a couple years [during] the pandemic when music was dead in the water," he explains, "but it kept gnawing at me that there was more to this, this idea of art and monsters and the unique personality type [of the] artist. The word 'tortured' goes hand in hand with 'artist,' so I thought it was perfect as a horror concept."

Some may remember the vocalist's work on horror mockumentary *Death*

*Valley*, which aired on MTV for one season in 2011, but *Allegoria* is his first fully self-directed and financed project, which made it a natural fit for the frontman of many hats.

"That's how I've always functioned with [Powerman 5000]," he says. "I write the songs and the press releases, design the wardrobe, direct the videos. My favourite films feel like they were made by one person, and that's what I do, because I don't have a choice. But I love that challenge."

This one-man army does, however, have a right-hand woman; Spider produced *Allegoria* alongside Fox, who does quadruple duty as the film's star, editor, sound designer, and life partner to the director, through their "homegrown" horror, sci-fi, and comedy company, OneFox productions. "We are like a two-person wrecking crew," Spider grins.

*Allegoria* will, no doubt, invite comparisons to the work of Spider's older brother, fellow metalhead-turned-horror-director, Rob Zombie, who dominated the noughties with projects like *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and *Halloween* (2007). He welcomes these, but assures viewers that a Spider One film is an altogether different beast.

"We are very much the same in our tastes, but we are very different people as well," he insists. "Obviously, we grew up together and all the influences are the same, but it comes out in a whole different way."

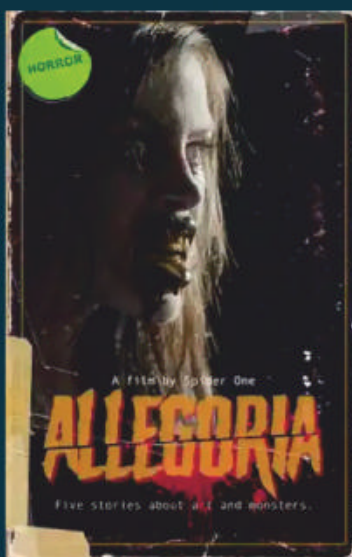
As for *Allegoria*'s biggest influence? Spider is a big fan of the 1970s NBC series *Night Gallery*, but unless you're a certain ghoulish-standard horror streaming service, don't you

dare call his project an anthology.

"You know who loves anthologies? Shudder loves anthologies," he says, laughing. "So I'm very grateful for them to embrace us, even though I don't consider [*Allegoria*] part of the format."

Ultimately, Spider is confident that he can chart his own course in modern horror, though his artistic goals are pretty simple.

"I hope that it plants my flag," he says. "And if my sensibility in horror resonates, that maybe you'll look forward to the next one, and the next one, and the next one..." 🧛





## Where The Scary Things Are

media footage torturing the creature goes viral. But when the goal of amassing more views overshadows their original assignment, the teens begin to turn on one another, making their reign of internet stardom the very least of their concerns.

Set in a real-life Pennsylvania haunt called Field of Screams, writer/director B. Harrison Smith (*Death House*) turns this off-season attraction into just as much a flesh-and-blood character as the cast. *Where the Scary Things Are* tackles very real coming-of-age angst, rage, issues with authority, and unsupportive home lives, even if the acting falls well short of the mark to support the story realistically. The strongest character in this indie horror is the haunt,

providing a vibrantly depraved atmosphere, perfect for adding validity to the often underwhelmingly amateur cast. It creates a nostalgic effect, inviting us into the haunted attractions we've come to love, but maybe haven't visited since the world blew up. It's a cozy kind of gory.

Come for the haunt, stay for Crockamoley, but not much else.

JILLIAN KRISTINA

## A BAD BROMANCE

### THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

Starring Luke Kleintank, Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Bruce Davison

Directed by Stephan Rick

Written by Stephan Rick, Ross Partridge and Silja Clemens

Screen Media/Highland Film Group/

Forma Pro Productions

*The Good Neighbor* (not to be confused with a 2016 prank horror movie of the same name starring James Caan) is less the twisty crime thriller it aspires to be than a series of convenient coincidences that make for a movie more likely to have viewers rolling their eyes than holding their breath.

Co-written and directed by Stephan Rick, the film follows David (Luke Kleintank), an American journalist who has been re-assigned to Riga, Latvia. Once off the plane, David connects with his new boss, Grant (Bruce Davison), and meets his neighbour, Robert (Jonathan Rhys Meyers). Things take a serious turn for the worse when David goes clubbing with Robert and ends up accidentally running over a woman he just exchanged numbers with. Robert convinces David to cover up the crime, setting up a soon-to-fizzle-out

conspiratorial bromance.

Although the cast is uniformly fine (sadly, the always-superb Davison is somewhat wasted in a supporting role), the characters are underwritten and the unfolding mystery calls for more suspension of disbelief than most fantasy films. A suggestion of homoerotic attraction between David and Robert is never developed, although an unlikely romance between David and the victim's sister does occur. Meyers, who can be deliciously flamboyant when given room (hey, this guy's played Dracula, Henry VIII, and Joe Strummer!), is reined in as the ironically eponymous antagonist. *The Good Neighbor* employs a somber, sombre tone throughout, but it could have benefitted from some scenery-chewing, to say nothing of more real suspense (oddly, several of the most pivotal crimes in the film take place off camera).

Technically the film is fine, if unremarkable, and it makes good use of the Latvian locations. Other-

wise, you're likely to come away from *The Good Neighbor* thinking that more than just that title has been used before.

LISA MORTON



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# REISSUED & REANIMATED

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

## SHOT ON VIDEO, RECOVERED ON BLU-RAY

The history of horror Blu-rays has demonstrated that with a properly repaired and restored negative, even the lowest-budget 16mm production can be given the sheen of a studio megapicture on hi-def disc. But what of those movies lensed on that lowest-fi of formats: the shot-on-video fright flicks of the 1980s and '90s, made before digital cinematography was an option for grassroots auteurs? They might never achieve the polish possible with even the cheapest celluloid projects, but these SOV shockers have a rough-hewn appeal – and fan base – all their own, and an increasing number of them are becoming available on Blu-ray.

Their latest purveyor is Rob Hauschild of *Wild Eye Releasing*, which is unleashing the first two titles under its new *Visual Vengeance* banner this month: Matt Jaissle's SOV *The Necro Files* (1997) and Shinichi Fukazawa's *Bloody Muscle Bodybuilder in Hell* (1995), filmed on Super-8 – another option utilized by moviemakers who couldn't afford 16mm. *Wild Eye* (as detailed in *RM#206*) is devoted to allowing disc exposure for current microbudgeters, and *Visual Vengeance* is an extension of that ambition.

"It's not too far a jump in spirit from the D.I.Y. movies of the '80s and '90s to those of today," Hauschild explains. "Many of the vintage indie movies from the VHS era inspired the founding of *Wild Eye*, so there is a 'coming home' aspect to

it in revisiting these movies on a hands-on level. Also, we've been handling new films from some of the most popular SOV directors of those decades, like Todd Sheets, Mark Polonia, Donald Farmer, Brad Sykes, etc., so there was always a strong connection to and respect for the vintage movies they made as well."

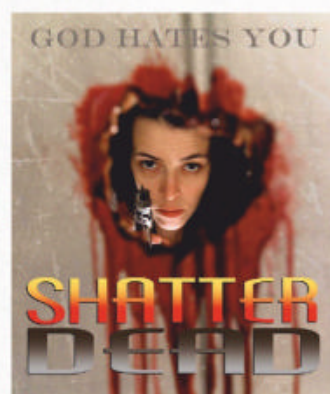
Also providing new exposure to those video vanguards of the past is Saturn's Core, run by Ross Snyder and William Hellfire. After the duo collaborated on *Mail Order Murder*, the documentary chronicling the history of custom-VHS purveyors W.A.V.E. Productions (for whom Hellfire once made movies), they put together a package of SOV features headed

by *Murder* and also including Hellfire and Joey Smack's controversial Columbine-inspired *Duck! The Carbine High Massacre* (1999). *Vinegar Syndrome* and its partner *OCN Distribution* bit, and since then *Saturn's Core* has issued Blu-rays of Scooter McCrae's 1994 *Shatter Dead* (full disclosure: this writer contributed a couple of featurettes to that disc), Eric Stanze's *Savage Harvest* (1994), Ronnie Sortor's *Sinistre* (1996), and a double feature of Charles Pinion's *Red Spirit Lake* (1993) and *We Await* (1996), among others.

"We wanted to re-introduce people to the SOV world," Hellfire remembers, "and we basically started calling all our filmmaker friends. Within the first two weeks, we had a year's worth of releases, including some of our personal SOV favourites."

Rounding up these movies may have been easy; then came the process of getting the features into the most presentable shape possible.

"*Duck!* was a serious challenge," Hellfire says. "In 1999, we had used an early digital editing system and could only export to tape, so the actual master for the VHS and DVD editions were MiniDV, which is ultracompressed and really didn't transcode to HD very well. So I had





Pete Jacelone, the producer, go back to the original source tapes. We encoded everything from S-VHS to Apple ProRes 422 and re-edited the picture from scratch. Minus some minor tape issues, *Duck!* has never looked better.”

*Red Spirit Lake*, *We Await*, and *Shatter Dead* have also been remastered from original tape sources, and Hellfire insists they all look better than any previous releases.

Even so, when it comes to bringing SOV to Blu-ray, Hauschild cautions, “Fans should not expect a 4K experience; trying to capture crisp and clear masters from decades-old, sometimes mouldy Betacam, one-inch tape, or even consumer VHS sources always poses problems. But we work with the best sources available from the original producers and do as much audio, video, and colour work as we can to present the absolute best version possible. Sometimes you’ll see VHS lines, tape waves, and other blemishes – some might argue that these things add to the VHS aesthetic of the times. I feel that these movies should not have to suffer in purgatory because of these qualities and the original format decisions by the filmmakers.”

Indeed, part of Hauschild’s mission is not just to unearth these homegrown productions and allow them new showcases, but to bring them a level of respect they didn’t achieve upon their initial releases.

“SOV producers in the vintage era were never able to shake the stigma of shooting on video or Super-8, and the industry discrimination that came with that,” he says. “Their ideas and creativity often took a back seat to that ‘SOV’ status in the eyes of the marketplace. I think much more so today, D.I.Y. filmmakers can comfortably lean into the ‘cheapness’ of their movies and still find distribution and success, whereas back then, you had to work harder to make your indie play more like a bigger movie shot on film.”

“Today it’s the opposite,” he adds. “If you say you’re shooting something on film, everyone looks at you like you’re insane!”

One way in which Visual Vengeance and Saturn’s Core are levelling the playing field is by stocking their Blu-rays with supplemental packages comparable to – or surpassing – those seen on studio or Criterion discs. Both companies’ releases come with audio commentaries,



*The Necro Files*



interviews, featurettes, etc., and according to both Hauschild and Hellfire, involving the filmmakers is a crucial factor.

Visual Vengeance has plenty more homegrown horror on the way: Dave Wascavage’s *Suburban Sasquatch* (2004) and Drew Goddard’s *L.A. AIDS Jabber* (a.k.a. *Jabber*, 1994) are on the slate for August, to be followed by Bret McCormick’s *The Abomination* (1986), Polonia’s *Splatter Farm* (1987), Sheets’ *Zombie Rampage* (1989), Kevin J. Lindenmuth’s *Addicted to Murder* (1995), and the Linnea Quigley vehicles *Heartland of Darkness* (a.k.a. *Blood Church*, 1992) and *Scream*

*Queen* (2002). Hellfire points out, though, that the SOV world encompasses a lot more than just scary stuff, and that their catalogues will become more varied as time goes on.

“We pulled pretty heavily from the horror genre when we started,” he notes, “so this coming year you will see a more genre-diverse Saturn’s Core lineup. We’re planning to release more sci-fi and action titles, and we’ll also have some very cool SOV documentaries out toward the end of the year. We are open to all kinds of SOV, whether it be super-ambitious or super-trashy – as long as it is, in our opinions, entertaining.”







# CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

## Apocalypse Rochester

by John W. Bowen

I've never actually read the Book of Revelation in its entirety – if you must know, I've been saving it for a really long poop – but when I finally get around to it, I'll be crushed if it turns out that all that earthshakin' and damnation and salvation and blowin' shit up we've been promised *doesn't* take place in upstate New York. And it'd better be rife – rife, I tell you – with hot and cold running barely repressed homosexuality to boot, 'cause that's the buffet of bombast *Fear No Evil* (1981) promised when I saw it back in high school. (At a drive-in. On a double date. On acid. And mushrooms.)

Stefan Arngrim plays Andrew, a.k.a. the Antichrist, a brainy, effeminate, and super-duper-evil high school outcast born to a straightlaced working-class couple in a small town near Rochester. Kathleen Rowe McAllen, Elizabeth Hoffman, and John Holland play a trio of angels sent to Earth in human form to stop him from taking over the world or, at the very least, fucking shit up big-time in the Eastern Great Lakes region. And Daniel Eden is Tony the Totally Cliché School Bully – will he suffer some kind of poetic justice? I'll never tell, so you'll have to watch, I guess.

Following a lengthy (and hilarious) prologue set-up, we catch up with Andrew during his senior year in high school. His grades are stellar but the other kids torment him mercilessly, and life at home is no better. His parents' marriage is miserably loveless and Mom is soon left a brain-damaged invalid via a hilariously tragic "accident" when Andrew's 18th birthday celebration goes horribly wrong. In fact, "gone horribly wrong" is a recurring motif here as Andrew makes the most of any opportunity to lash out with his hell-spawned powers, Damien-meets-Carrie-style: an Easter Passion Play, a boozy teen makeout party, and – best! – a testosterone-spurting gym class dodgeball game that really must be seen to be disbelieved. It all finally goes climactically cattywumpus in a full-on *Dawn of the Dead* free-for-all, garnished with – I kid you not – what appears to be quick detour into *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*.



But wait – there's more, and it ain't entirely onscreen. Writer/director Frank LaLoggia (*Lady in White*) has long since disclosed that he was attempting to exorcise some demons of his own while making *Fear No Evil* as a deeply unhappy and then-closeted young gay man. This certainly goes a long way toward explaining the abundance of male nudity (including the odd split-second flopping peen shot) and more man-on-man unspoken sexual tension than *Elm Street 2* giving *Top Gun* a post-workout deep-tissue massage. It also speaks volumes about Andrew, obviously invested with much of LaLoggia's own self-image as simultaneously pitiable yet loathsome. It *should* make us feel a little bad about laughing ourselves into incontinence at the spectacle of *Fear No Evil*'s overblown clumsiness; and in a better film, it would.

More than one reviewer has called *Fear No Evil* "a child of its time" but that's both lazy and woefully inaccurate; "Red-headed, brain-damaged mutant stepchild that crash-lands in about three different eras simultaneously" is less catchy but a damn sight more apt for a Catholic-neuroses-fuelled coming-of-age reluctant-Antichrist number

gussied up in hilariously awful effects and awkward homoeroticism. After all, the satanic cinema craze – the few parts that genuinely mattered, at any rate – blazed and fizzled in less than a decade. *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) was foreplay, *The Exorcist* (1973) was the climax and *The Omen* (1976)

was a postcoital smoke, snuggle, and half-hearted promise to call sometime. End of era – next! *Fear No Evil* didn't arrive until five years later, splat-dab in the middle of the slasher boom and, while admirably energetic, is deadly earnest and pompous to the point of unintentional hilarity. And unintentional hilarity, Wretched Reader, is a one-way ticket to Bowen's Basement.

I first reviewed *Fear No Evil* way back in *RM#36* when it was reissued on DVD. I wasn't particularly kind to it at the time and it may seem that this hasn't changed. But goddamn if

the thing hasn't grown on me since then, albeit for all the wrong reasons; I guess I just can't turn away from a train wreck, especially a pompous, awkwardly homoerotic train wreck with terrible effects – can you? Now get the hell out of my basement and find Sam Elliott, strap him into a *Clockwork Orange* chair, and show him *Fear No Evil* on repeat.

PS – Much love and Godspeed, Glenn Tilson. ♥







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# FILES FROM THE BLACK MUSEUM

THE LONG SHADOWS OF CLASSIC HORROR'S PAST

BY PAUL CORUPE

## Brain Power

**"THE BRAIN FROM PLANET AROUS IS A SURPRISINGLY RELEVANT TALE ABOUT AN ALIEN BEING WHO CAN OVERTAKE HUMAN MINDS AND USE THEM AS A FORCE FOR DESTRUCTION."**

As the way we access information has evolved over the years, it's often all we can do just to keep up. The internet may put hundreds of libraries worth of information at our fingertips, but it sure hasn't made us any smarter – instead, the daily onslaught of online news and discourse appears to make it all the more difficult to get a grasp on what's really going on in our world. Rather than manipulating the flow of data for our benefit, it appears that information itself has started to rewire our brains, reshaping our personalities and even guiding normally reasonable people to outright fanaticism. Now out on Blu-ray from Film Detective, the 1957 camp classic *The Brain from Planet Arous* may not seem like it could have much to say about this modern predicament, but it's a surprisingly relevant tale about an alien being who can overtake human minds and use them as a force for destruction.

Unusual even by 1950s schlock standards, *The Brain from Planet Arous* stars horror movie stalwart John Agar as Steve March, a level-headed research scientist who heads out with his assistant Dan Murphy (Robert Fuller) to investigate a sudden spike in gamma radiation just outside of town. While searching a nearby cave, Steve is overtaken by a giant translucent floating brain named Gor, a criminal fugitive from the far-off world of Arous. Gor enters Steve's mind and takes control of his body – first he murders Dan and then heads home to make aggressive passes at Steve's suspicious girlfriend Sally (Joyce Meadows). Using his telepathic powers to explode airplanes in mid-flight, the megalomaniacal Gor hopes to meet with political leaders as part of a blackmail plan to lead an Earth army against his old enemies back on Arous. But Gor doesn't realize that he's being tracked by intergalactic cop Vol – another brain creature who slips inside the mind of Steve's dog – who informs Sally of his race's mortal weakness to sharp axes.

While the film's bug-eyed floating grey-matter monsters are certainly one-of-a-kind, the idea of invading aliens that take on human forms is a common plot device of the era. Although this trope usually refers to then-rampant anxiety about lurking communism, *The Brain from Planet Arous'* handling of this idea could just as easily be a warning against



coming under the spell of thoughts and beliefs that can fundamentally change who we are. A semi-visible "creature of pure intellect," Gor is literally a thought monster who easily transforms Steve from a rational scientist to a single-minded zealot pursuing fantasies of revenge. While possessed by Gor, Steve is powerless to break the evil brain's grip – he assaults his girlfriend, kills dozens, and threatens entire nations with mind weapons that he claims are more powerful than the atom bomb.

With Sally's help, Steve eventually does manage to rid himself of Gor's nefarious influence, but these kinds of drastic personal transformations are harder to shake off in real life. We probably all know somebody who underwent a similar mental makeover in recent years – seemingly rational acquaintances who spiralled into a dark digital world of contrarianism, cynicism, and even flat-out conspiracy. We can't know all the reasons why these people suddenly start to act uncharacteristically – their minds hijacked by hardline, reactionary opinions – but it seems likely that the fast-paced, relentless nature of online information is at least partly to blame. Their smug, angry behaviour may be little more than an elaborate coping mechanism, a mental shortcut that allows them to prejudge and re-sort each new piece of random news into simplistic, reassuring categories – either more corrupt media propaganda or further proof that some opposition's "narrative is crumbling." Worse, this addictive stockpiling of alleged evidence is a self-perpetuating cycle, deepening imagined resentments until the people we once knew seem barely recognizable.

Whether we're being invaded by cerebrum-shaped criminals or just the latest trending topics, it's important to recognize that our brains, while undeniably powerful, are still extremely susceptible to negative outside forces. It's obvious now that allowing ourselves to be overcome by bitterness and anger – especially when we're subjected to a constant barrage of conflicting, confusing, and often misleading information – can cause real damage in the world. Sure, the destruction may not always be as palpable as an exploding plane, but it can still leave behind a trail of needless hostility, bullying, and ruined relationships. And while it's hard to see others become distorted versions of their former selves, it's worth keeping in mind that we may all be just a few clicks away from losing ourselves, too. 🧠



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# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

**E**roticism is a fundamental part of the vampire legend, allowing writers to explore myriad aspects of sexuality, either allegorically or much more directly via a vampire's sucking habits. Finnish author Otava Heikkilä falls into the latter camp with his popular *Letters for Lucardo* series, depicting enough graphic sex to make a Tijuana bible blush. That the graphic sex in question occurs between two men makes it more conspicuous; that both men are genuinely in love with each other makes it that much more special, even if one of them happens to be a vampire.

"Showing something as vulnerable and personal as unobstructed sex acts humanizes the subject," explains Heikkilä of his decision to show the naughty bits. "Monsters in horror only stay as scary as they are unclear or indiscernible to us, right?"

It seems like a strange approach for a writer to make his vampire protagonist less scary than sexy, but it has proven successful across two volumes and now a third, *The Silent Lord*. For the uninitiated, the eponymous Lucardo von Gishaup is a tenth-century vampire and member of the

royal (and vampiric) Night Court. When Lucardo falls in love with the 61-year-old mortal Edmund, the aristocrat's father chases Edmund away, disapproving of his son's love for a human and the repercussions that might have for the vampire family.

"At the time of starting the project I was 25 years old, freshly graduated from art school, embarrassed by my seeming lack of artistic vision and vehemently rejecting my queer identity," reveals Heikkilä. "Rather than the comic being something I premeditated to be a project about x and y, it was instead something that I submerged myself into, to escape into lavish, queer, dark fantasy, where my subconscious could start sorting itself out. The moment I began, it opened these floodgates that allowed me to be more real with myself, and that, in turn, has made me able to access my voice as an author better."

Vulnerability is a key theme throughout *Lucardo*. Edmund's mortality has made him the victim of a terminal disease called Shifter's Lung, which is slowly killing him. But the vampires themselves are also victims of a sort, bound by traditions and politics, garnering equal sympathy from the reader. Like the graphic sexuality, it's a means of humanizing the monsters, but this is not because Heikkilä wants to strip the series of its horror roots. Rather, it's to make way for the true threat that's been lurking in the shadows for the last two volumes.

"Ultimately, the Night Court of vampires isn't where the horror of this setting originates," says Heikkilä. "There's another entity beyond them that does exhibit those qualities of a monster, whom I can't exactly call a vampire, because part of his portrayal is that you don't really know what he is at all, beyond a monster."

Enter the Silent Lord, whose very nature has been kept a secret from both Edmund and the reader. But Lucardo can't keep the truth from his



*The Silent Lord: The third volume of the **Letters to Lucardo** series introduces a new brand of monster to the queer, dark fantasy story.*

lover forever, and so the third volume features a tonal shift into much darker territory as Lucardo is forced to save his lover's life by finally opening the closed doors.

"Silent Lord is not benevolent," Heikkilä notes. "He lives an existence of eternal sensory deprivation, hungry for stimulation of any kind at all. Left with nothing but boundlessness and boredom, Silent Lord becomes a true image of monstrosity. And so the whole story, all of its characters, and ultimately its conclusion, orbit this monster at the centre, who is looking for nothing except the next instance of thrill to abate his eternal boredom." 🧛

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# QUICK CUTS

I admire anyone who creates vampire-centric books. After all, it can't be easy to come up with new approaches to everyone's favourite bloodsucking freaks. Luckily the folks behind *Blood Stained Teeth* have risen to the grave occasion by presenting readers with a concept filled with dramatic and horrific potential. Among present-day vampires are two castes: the First Born – rich, powerful, and manipulative of human society – and the Sip – vicious humans-turned-vampires, forbidden by the First Born. Trouble arises when vampire rebel Atticus Sloane is accused by the First Born of turning several humans into Sips. Now, he must hunt down and exterminate his creations or face dire consequences. In addition to playing with various vampire tropes and legends, *Blood Stained Teeth* also takes a satisfying satirical bite out of modern culture's obsession with social media, celebrities, and influencers.



It's the end of the world as we know it, and Darla Clemenceau does not feel fine. Ever since she was abducted by a UFO as a child, Darla has been plagued with apocalyptic visions of the world razed by alien monsters. As doomsday approaches, she finds herself the unwilling pawn of a radical cult militia who want to use her for their survival. *Promethee 13:13* is a prequel to Christophe Bec's French graphic novel *Prométhée* in



which a devastating disaster strikes Earth across thirteen days at 13:13 pm. I suspect this entry was devised as a means of introducing American readers to the original series, but it might work better if readers come in without expectations of what is to come. The less one knows about Darla's predictions or the mysterious creature awakening on the dark side of the moon, the more effective the book becomes when building suspense.

Julie West's husband, Henry, has been kidnapped; snatched in the night by masked gunmen. Receiving little help from the police, Julie tries desperately to figure out what's happened, not realizing that Henry has been summoned home to *A Town Called Terror*. It seems that Henry's

father has passed away – except this isn't the first time the old man has died – and Henry is less than enthused to be back on his family's estate. If the narrative doesn't convince you we're dealing with something otherworldly, Szymon Kudranski's art certainly will; using mostly heavy greys with liberal splashes of red, it paints a very foreboding and gothic picture, especially once we hit the old homestead. Small wonder Henry isn't looking forward to his return.



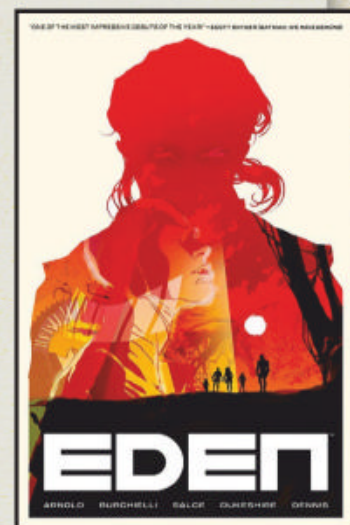
Former Vatican exorcist Professor Dario Bava is back in *Orgy of the Blood Freaks*: this time investigating a haunted abbey in 1967 Rome. With the help of nun-turned-occult-investigator Sister Sadie, Bava hopes to avenge the murder of his assistant and end a rash of vicious nocturnal attacks in the surrounding area. While Bava's previous outing, *Murder Vibes from the Monster Dimension*, served as a brisk introduction to his groovy and gory world, this entry proceeds at a leisurely pace, allowing more room for characterization and plot. Make sure to grab the exclusive Double Feature flip book with the additional *Gringo Loco: Dead Late and*



*a Dollar Short*. What Bava is to '60s/'70s Euro horror, *Gringo* is to classic spaghetti westerns with plenty of bloodshed and violence – plus a zombie cowboy thrown in for kicks. Both tales are loving tributes to the eras and good stories in their own right.

Sometime in the future, a group of cryogenically frozen criminals are thawed to find a world abandoned by humans and overrun with vegetation

and giant predatory animals. With no choice but to begin anew in this garden of Eden, human nature once again threatens to destroy humanity. At five issues, *Eden* is well-paced and certainly hits the right story and character beats. Yet the book's conclusion comes just when things start to heat up and the reader has begun to dream up multiple story possibilities. There's a clever, out-of-left-field climax, but it's simultaneously frustrating as it slaps those possibilities upside the head. It's hard to criticize author Matt Arnold as his story does exactly what it set out to do, but one wonders if it couldn't have benefitted from a bit more time exploring this brave new world.



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## NINTH CIRCLE

BOOKS

## IT'S ALIVE!

Julian David Stone

Greenleaf Book Group Press

It's to Julian David Stone's credit that he conjures so much drama and tension out of fictionalizing historical events. After all, we know that Universal studio executive Junior Laemmle made *Frankenstein* and that he did it with director James Whale and an unknown Boris Karloff. But *It's Alive!* manages to bring life – pun intended – to the days leading up to Day One of filming on that 1931 classic.

The way Stone presents events, Laemmle's odds of making *Frankenstein* were slim. Yes, he had a huge success with *Dracula* earlier in '31, but his father Carl was still head of Universal and wasn't sure audiences would pay to see such macabre material. Junior believed in *Frankenstein* but he also wanted his father's job, which he was promised if he agreed to drop the film.

In the book, Laemmle's story is shared with the actors up for the Monster role: Karloff and Bela Lugosi. Laemmle had lobbied hard for Lugosi, but the *Dracula* star was loathe to play a role in which he didn't speak. Stone conveys both Lugosi's ego and his awareness that his career might depend on accepting Laemmle's offer. The fact that we worry Lugosi might take the gig speaks volumes to Stone's narrative abilities.

Karloff, meanwhile, is depicted as the epitome of the Hollywood striver: hard-working and talented but desperate. He is less worried about *Frankenstein* making him a star and more about having a payday to cover his rent. Stone's depiction of how Karloff won the role (by removing his dental bridge during a screen test to give the Monster his cadaverous look) is genuinely thrilling.

*It's Alive* raises the curtain on both the politics of the movie business and the fragile egos of its stars and powerbrokers. Kudos to Stone for both depicting and celebrating a key moment in horror history while also revealing the narcissism, calculation, and willpower that made it happen.

SEAN PLUMMER

## THE VERMILION BOOK OF OCCULT FICTION

Brian Stableford, ed.

Snuggly Books

Snuggly Books debuted a series of anthologies devoted to occult fiction earlier this year with *The Zinzolin Book of Occult Fiction*, edited by Brendan Connell, devoted entirely to British authors. It's now followed by a more exotic and esoteric volume – its contents coming from France – edited, translated (many for the first time in English), and with an introduction by the tireless Brian Stableford.

The stories in this anthology originated in the 19th and early 20th centuries and most of the authors' names will be unknown even to the most devoted lovers of the fantastique, except perhaps Remy de Gourmont, Joséphin Péladan, and Camille Flammarion – but that is precisely the point of a selection like this: it uncovers the unknown and sheds new light on our understanding of this particular aspect of French fantasy and horror literature. Brian Stableford's expert Introduction contains, in its twenty pages, a wealth of information sufficient to justify the purchase of this book in itself. It positions the French occult revival of the 19th century and its literary spinoffs between the Romantic movement and fin de siècle developments, pointing to various connections between authors and ideas, including influences from Eastern philosophies, theosophy, spiritualism, Satanism, etc.



Those esoteric ideas and practices are dealt with in the stories whose titles are telling enough: "The Succubus," "The Dead Avenge Themselves," "Reincarnation," "The Mystery of an Incarnation," "Love Among the Stars," "The Temple," etc.

While a few of the earliest stories bear an obvious debt to E.A. Poe and did not age particularly well, most of this selection will be intriguing and revealing to would-be initiates who won't mind the dustiness of old manuscripts and old school frissons tinged with the occult.

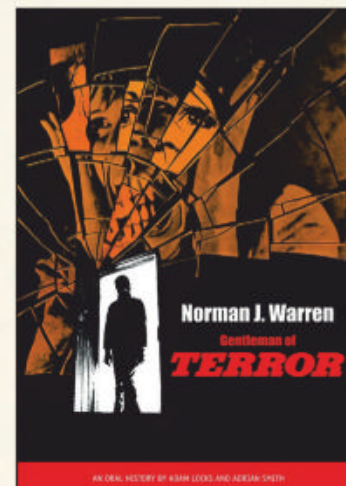
DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

## NORMAN J. WARREN: GENTLEMAN OF TERROR

Adam Locks and Adrian Smith

Creepy Images

German publisher Creepy Images has come a long way since its glossy, image-heavy magazines first started showing up regularly at the *Rue Morgue* office. This impressive leap forward is best illustrated by its hardback releases. The latest turns the spotlight on British director Norman J. Warren, who made nine features between the 1970s and '80s, five of them horror: *Satan's Slave*, *Prey*, *Terror*, *Inseminoid*, and *Bloody New Year*.



The book covers all nine movies, which also include a drama, a sex comedy, and an action/espionage flick, and is presented as an oral history. After a foreword by film critic Alan Jones and an introduction that includes details about Warren's childhood and

career outside of features, there's a chapter on each film, with general info about the project, a cast and crew list, production details (including budget), and a plot summary. Then we're launched into the "In Their Own Words..." oral history. While it's undeniably interesting to read the thoughts and experiences of those involved in the films, including Warren himself, this format runs into some difficulty as the subject matter doesn't always flow well, given that the quotes have been gathered from a variety of different interviews/sources. As a result, these sections read less like a coherent conversation than a collection of reminiscences. Luckily, the latter part of the chapters puts it all into context with a look at what the censors cut, the films' reception and press coverage, and a conclusion that fills in more of the details.

Warren aficionados will undoubtedly find loads of meaty tidbits in *Gentleman of Terror*, but what will really make fans swoon is the generous quantity of full-colour images included throughout the book's 172 oversized pages, everything from movie and behind-the-scenes stills to promo art and posters (both foreign and domestic), sometimes given a full page to thrill and delight.





Norman J. Warren: Gentleman of Terror: Satan's Slave.

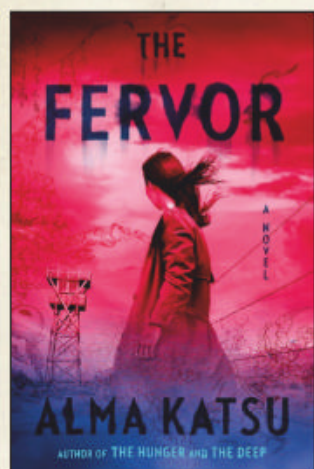
This may not be the definitive word on Warren's career, but it's likely as definitive as we're going to get, so snatch it up.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

## THE FERVOR

Alma Katsu  
G.P. Putnam's Sons

It's 1944 and Japanese Americans have been living in internment camps for more than two years. That's where Meiko and her daughter Aiko are, and it's just one of the places where a deadly new disease is spreading: one that makes you itchy and angry at first, then violent, then it kills you. But it's not just in the camps, it's out in the wild, spreading from strange exploding balloons that have been falling from the sky along the American West Coast and Midwest. That's how reporter Fran and guilt-stricken minister Archie first encounter it.



*The Fervor*, named after the story's mysterious infection, is a tale of sorting truth from lies and paranoia, and allies from enemies. It's also a stark account of the pervasive racism and sexism of the era, informed by the author's own family history and historical events. While the men they encounter frequently dismiss Meiko and Fran, both women are smart, capable, and fully aware of how they are perceived by those around them.

The supernatural elements in the book, while ever present, largely come in the form of omens and warnings (such as the sudden appearance of a ghostly woman in a bright red kimono) with the exception of the *kitsune* that appears to Aiko, but Aiko is an unusual child who has always seen things that others can't, filling up her notebooks with drawings of spirits and demons.

Alma Katsu, who is no stranger to historical fiction, having penned *The Hunger* and *The Deep*, admits in her afterword that more narrative liberties and timeline tweaks occurred in this book than the others, but of course, those are necessary when inserting a biological threat where there wasn't one – and then ensuring that the resulting story hits the appropriate narrative and emotional beats. Deeply moving, at times frustrating (for the right reasons), and with an intriguing mystery to keep the pages turning, catching *The Fervor* is well worth your while, but you might not be able to shake it afterwards.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

## WHAT MOVES THE DEAD

T. Kingfisher  
Tor Nightfire

Experience the world of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" like never before. T. Kingfisher reimagines the gothic classic and creates a unique experience whilst remaining true to the heart of the late author's classic work. Updated with a genderqueer protagonist, a familiar, crumbling manse, and a fungus sure to terrify, *What Moves the Dead* is a must-read.

Alex Easton (pronouns ka/kas) is a sworn soldier of Gallacia who is called to Ruravia after a

## DANTE'S PICK



## THE PUPPET KING AND OTHER ATONEMENTS

Justin A. Burnett  
Trepidatio Publishing

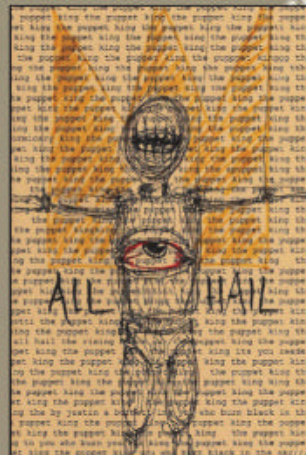
The editor of *Mannequin: Tales of Wood Made Flesh* (2019; see RM#191) takes the stage with his debut collection, *The Puppet King*, and it deserves all the praise and success that its small-press origin may not bring. Hopefully the quality of his writing will attract wider recognition because this is a volume of first-rate significance.

Bleak, melancholy, and as intelligent as the best by Thomas Ligotti and Jon Padgett, these tales come unmistakably from a deep, personal place and will best resonate with seekers of metaphysical horrors, as some are not so easily reduced to a clear plot. In "The Toy Shop," the protagonist's pain after his son's suicide overshadows a supernova. And what are we to make of "The Enucleator," which describes a live-feed website with a crazed architect's final, labyrinthine masterpiece? Burnett's characters, like the one in "A Prisoner's Guide to Stargazing," typically wonder: "Is pain something I project onto this proxy universe, or is it the underlying substance of all existence to which I've been tuned?"

Even when plots are clearer, the terror is overwhelming. In "Devourer," an interviewer comes deep into the woods to talk to a black-metal musician whose radical sounds reach unspeakable spheres. "The Rubber Man" sees a woman abandon her entire life to hide in a bunker on an uncharted island – but the titular entity may wait in the corridors beneath. "Endemic" has a man investigating his mother's disappearance related to a certain cave and thin red worms, its endemic species. And in "The Golden Thread," a worker for a clandestine institution introduces a novice to his job: observing a piece of desert where laws of space and time are undermined.

Pain. Loss. Grief. Alienation. Futility. The unspeakable. The unknowable. Those are the real horrors, and Justin A. Burnett is their new poet and prophet. Heed him. Fear him. His stories will haunt you like few others.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ





GABINO IGLESIAS STEEPS HIS CRIME-HORROR HYBRID  
**THE DEVIL TAKES YOU HOME** IN MEXICAN CARTEL  
VIOLENCE AND SINISTER MAGIC

# A Dance With Darkness

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

**W**HEN EVERYTHING IS TOTAL SHIT, HOW FAR WOULD YOU GO FOR A CHANCE TO FIX IT?

That question looms large in rising star Gabino Iglesias' latest novel, *The Devil Takes You Home*, and for its main character Mario, who loses his four-year-old daughter Anita to leukemia and, soon thereafter, his wife Melisa when he pushes her through a table in a rage. Mario's been working as a hitman to pay for Anita's cancer treatment, killing what he's told are "very bad men," so when he gets a lead on a heist involving a cartel shipment that could earn him enough to give up crime forever (and maybe even win Melisa back), it proves impossible to say no – despite the haunting premonitions he's experienced his entire life throwing up nothing but warning signs.

"I like to explore what happens when regular people are thrown into bad situations," says Iglesias, "because I find quintessential 'bad' characters boring. And because I love to give readers stories that make them realize the things they think they would never do today are things they might be more than willing to do to defend a loved one, survive an attack, or finally get out of a bad situation. I felt like a grieving father was the perfect vehicle to tell this story."

Iglesias wrote the bulk of the novel after losing his job teaching high school in the early months of the pandemic. It gave him an outlet for all the things he was feeling as a result of suddenly being unemployed and uninsured.

"I put all that anger into the book," he confesses, "and it shaped the story because I was starting to think I'd jump at the opportunity to do some bad things if that meant knowing where the money for rent was going to come from."

And yes, some very bad things do happen within these pages: entrails fed to crocodiles from a still-living human and grisly protection rituals requiring the amputation of a child's appendages among them. But *The Devil Takes You Home* (out August 2 from Mulholland

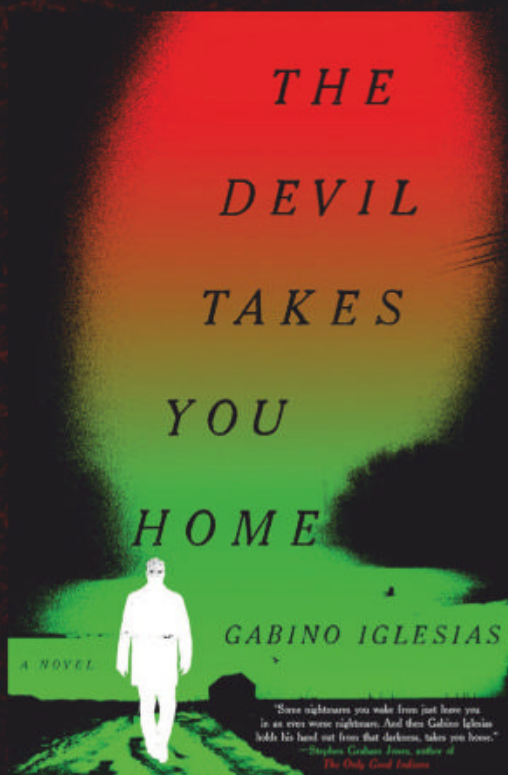
Books) also makes demands of readers that go beyond its squirm-inducing scenes. Chiefly, a willingness to consume a story that frequently switches to Spanish. The novel can be enjoyed without translating these sections – translations are included where pivotal – but those who take the time will be rewarded. Iglesias admits that writing in two languages is a constant balancing act.

"I'm not a native English speaker," he says. "In fact, I think I started learning when I was ten years old or so. Being bilingual is my reality. Having a conversation with someone or teaching a workshop in English is easy for me, but there is always the chance that I'll forget a word. I want to pull readers into that frame of mind. You don't know exactly what something means because it's said in Spanish in the book? Welcome to the life of millions of people who live in the United States and aren't native [English] speakers. Also, I think using language as people would really use it is how you bring authenticity to your work."

Speaking of authenticity, it bears mentioning that aside from its mostly realistic portrayal of the Mexican cartels (monsters notwithstanding), *The Devil Takes You Home* offers a stark reminder of the racism still endemic in the U.S., and Iglesias' protagonist doesn't hesitate in enumerating the myriad ways that gringos and systemic racism have stood in his path.

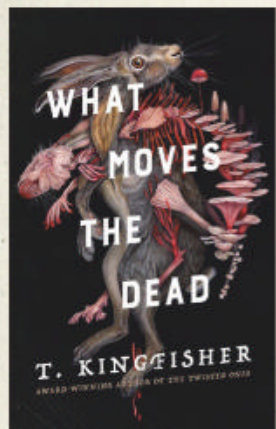
"I think it's crucial to remember that horror was all about fear of the Other for decades, and now it turns out the Other can write horror as well, if not better, than those who were scared of them," says Iglesias. "As for racism, I have never seen a racist pull a punch, so I'm not going to do it. Books like [Alma Katsu's] *The Fervor*, Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians*, and *The Devil Takes You Home*

might seem harsh, but that's because they work like mirrors, and folks with ugly souls don't like looking at themselves. This is the new Golden Era of horror, and diversity is a big part of that."





childhood friend, Madeline, falls ill. Ka immediately notices that things are off at the Usher family estate. Local hares behave strangely, an emaciated Madeline suffers from cataleptic seizures, and only the fungal inhabitants are thriving. Alex is immersed in a quickly deteriorating situation and his reactions speak to both the relatability of the character and Kingfisher's skill as a writer.



Coming in at just under 200 pages, the dread and beauty of Poe's tale remain even as the author deftly weaves in more gore and horror with a new focus on the local flora and fauna: mushrooms that smell of death, preternatural hares, and the transformation of Madeline all bring something fresh to Poe's original tale. And Alex is the perfect vehicle for this experience; the abject terror he experiences leaps off the page. Several scenes seem specifically designed to assault the senses as readers discover what is really happening to Madeline and why the hares skulk about in packs and refuse to die.

From Kingfisher's opening of a mushroom with "the deep-red color of severed muscle, the almost-violet shade that contrasts so dreadfully with the pale pink of viscera," to the conclusion of both human and fungal relationships, readers will be hard pressed to put this down. And, because it's also mentioned in the Author's Note, be sure to pick up *Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia for another highly recommended journey into fungal horror.

TRACY ROBINSON

## JUST LIKE HOME

Sarah Gailey  
Tor

The genre may be deluged with haunted house stories, but as long as authors like Sarah Gailey keep coming up with compelling twists on the subject, we're unlikely to witness the end of them anytime soon.

*Just Like Home* sees estranged daughter Vera returning to the Crowder House, her childhood home and the location of some horrific events, which are hinted at throughout the novel but only fully revealed near the end. Still, it's easy to guess that Vera's father was a very bad man; whatever he did within those four walls made him notorious and not just in her hometown. That notoriety is how Vera's mother, now terminally ill, has been able to survive all these years following his incarceration and death — by welcoming artists, gawkers, and morbid tourists onto the property. Right now, James Duvall is in residence in the shed, and he intends to create artwork in which he "collaborates" with the house itself.

The high weirdness kicks in the moment Vera arrives. There's something odd about her mom, whose voice is somehow wrong and who keeps spitting up copious amounts of stuff that looks like liquidy black tar while passing in and out of moments of surprising lucidity. There's also the mysterious shadow creature that Vera occasionally glimpses, the torn pages of her dead father's journal that keep turning up in strange places, and the terrifying realization that something has rearranged her entire bedroom while she slept.

To reveal the true nature of what's been happening at Crowder House would ruin both the mystery and the narrative journey, which is unwrapped in a slow, deliberate, and highly effective manner that will leave even the most observant readers guessing.

If you love spooky houses, the Crowder House is waiting for you. Stay a while... or stay forever.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



# LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

FREE AND WEIRD

In times of seemingly endless inflation, it's refreshing to see something go in the other direction, especially when it involves horror fiction. Starting with issue 4, *Weird Horror Magazine* is free to read online. With contributors such as Simon Strantzas and Steve Rasnic Tem, as well as a cadre of up-and-coming talents, [weirdhorormagazine.com](http://weirdhorormagazine.com) is a destination begging to be bookmarked.

"*Weird Horror* is an amalgam of modes," explains editor Michael Kelly, who is also the proprietor of *Undertow Publications*. "It's an inclusive and contemporary updating of the classic weird tale, and also a blending of weird fiction (where a sense of awe and the numinous is more prevalent) and classic fear-inducing horror fiction. Thus, the magazine is home to a fairly broad subset of stories from pulpy monsters to gothic ghosts, dark crime and sci-fi, supernatural tales, to the surreal and strangely oneiric."

Among the notable stories in issue 4 are J.F. Gleeson's supremely weird "The Floating House," about a child who must stay overnight in a house full of floating people who resemble corpses but have "alive eyes"; Linda Niehoff's "Fever Girls," in which a society of young women catch fevers in order to communicate (and fall in love) with the dead; "Milk Teeth" by Annika Barranti Klein, a werewolf story told through the innocent eyes of a child; "Figments of the Night" by Armel Dagorn, about a town tradition that proves to be a lot more eerie than it first appears; and Tem's "Whenever It Comes," which will feel familiar to anyone who has had to weather months of COVID lockdowns, until its decidedly strange and mysterious twist.

"We select stories from our two open reading periods each year, during the months of March and September," says Kelly. "We do not solicit fiction. All our stories are chosen completely from the submissions received. We try to balance each issue in terms of tone, theme, subject matter. ... And we actively publish new and emerging writers."

*Weird Horror* #4 includes a couple of non-fiction pieces, as well as some capsule book and movie reviews covering releases from a variety of eras, but the fiction is the highlight. Unfortunately, due to rights issues, there are no plans to post issues 1 through 3, but they are available for purchase in both physical and electronic versions. Buying them or hitting the donate button on the site remains the best way to keep the strangeness coming.

"Online fiction magazines seem to generate more discourse and garner more attention," says Kelly of the decision to make *Weird Horror* free. "When I see people discussing short fiction, invariably it's from a free, online magazine. I understand that. It's a question of access. We want our stories read and discussed. We want our writers receiving the attention they deserve."

MONICA S. KUEBLER

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# THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS

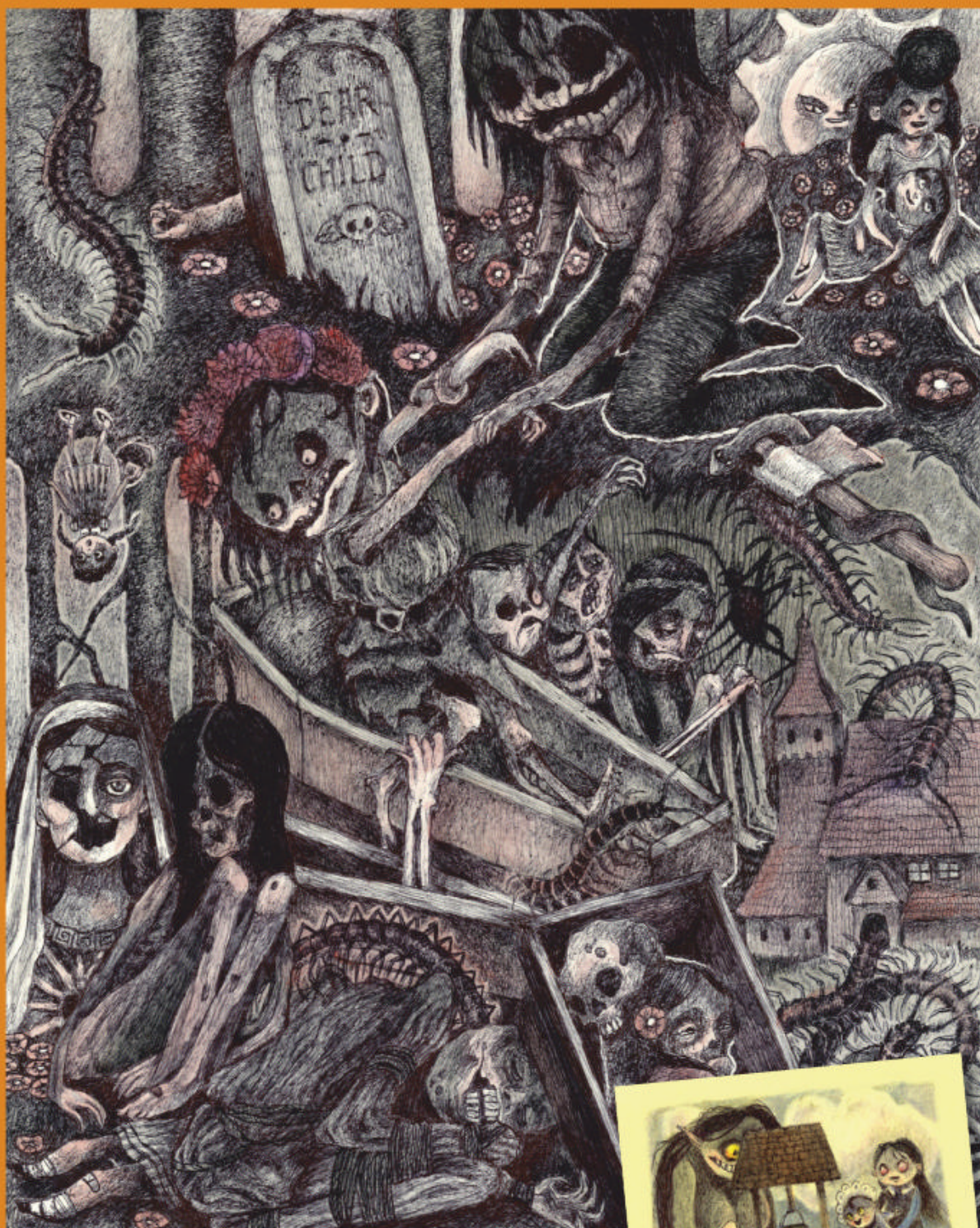
207



THIS MONTH:  
THE CREEPY KID ART OF KAMILA MLYNARCZYK

A **RUE MORCUE** COLLECTIBLE





Polish-Canadian artist Kamila Mlynarczyk channels a playful, whimsical world to create art dolls, sculptures, original drawings and prints that are not meant for children's eyes! Her dreadful and delightful characters are adorable yet gruesome, eager to play and maim with equal exuberance. Venture into her Wooded Wood of mischief, malice, and macabre delight!

## NAME

Kamila Mlynarczyk

## HOMETOWN

"I was born in a little village in the south of Poland called Debno, but moved to Ontario, Canada, when I was four years old."

## WEAPON OF CHOICE

"I love ballpoint pens, acrylic washes, and pencil crayons. Most of the time, I don't plan any rough sketches out, I just go right in with the pen and a confident hand, and with enough practice, it results in some really weird and interesting things I had no idea I was going to draw."

## DEEDS

"I am most proud of the art book I have been working on with Canadian publisher Eye of Newt, it's coming out [in October]. It's called *I Can Be Myself When Everyone I Know is Dead*. It features my work from the last ten years or so, including my foray into art dolls, more serious horror drawings, and the silly, irreverent, more stylized drawings I do currently."

## MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"The internet, horror movies, and short stories have always been an infinite source of inspiration and nightmares for me. I've always been an avid reader and sometimes I come upon some truly amazing short stories or novels that just stay with me in my bones. And movies are probably most inspirational."

## LAST WORDS

"Look at little kid drawings: they are fearless and they inspire me a lot! Also, if I'm stuck in a rut and I feel like I can't draw, I think of the most messed-up, weird, or absurd thing and just draw that! It usually ends up being so fun and outrageous, and it forces you not to take yourself so seriously and loosens you up enough to get drawing!"

## RESTING PLACE

Find Kamila on Instagram [@woodedwoods](https://www.instagram.com/woodedwoods), and her shop at [woodedwoods.com](https://www.woodedwoods.com).

**FOLLOW PAIGE ON INSTAGRAM**  
**@PAIGEREYNOLDSART**



A DUMPSTER DIVE INTO HORROR'S ODDS & CURIOS

# DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS

BY  
STACIE  
PONDER

**I**F YOU'VE BEEN READING THIS COLUMN FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME, then you've likely gleaned

that I am something of a slasher franchise aficionado (or obsessive, if you will). I can't help it – slashers were central to my early formative years as a horror fan. These days I find myself fascinated by the ways each series has (or hasn't) evolved, particularly when it comes to the central villains themselves. What are their journeys? What are we told outright about them, and what must we infer?

Freddy Krueger managed to pass through the veil between reality and the dreamscape, and thus he can become, say, a television or a motorcycle as he so pleases. I've previously touched on Michael Myers as a possible fresh fennel enthusiast, as well as Leatherface's potential skincare woes and penchant for arts and crafts. But Jason Voorhees... Jason is a whole-ass mess, and I kinda love him for it.

He dies as a child, or maybe he doesn't. He's killed, but then he comes back – a few times, actually. In the ninth installment of the series, we learn that he's something of an amorphous malevolent force passed between hosts via oral ingestion of a black phallus-blob thing. In the subsequent film, he reverts to simply being a dudebro, albeit a dudebro capable of cellular regeneration who goes on a space adventure.

This willy-nilly, let go/let gore approach likely stems from the fact that way back in 1980, no one really expected *Friday the 13th* to be such a success that there would be an immediate demand for more campground shenanigans. But demand more audiences did, and so with barely more than a nod from the screenwriters, the young boy who drowned was suddenly undrowned and living in the woods that surround Crystal Lake. This notion is what brings me to the detail that *ki-ki-ki ma-ma-mas* through my mind more often than I care to admit: the murder of *Friday the 13th* final girl Alice, which kicks off *Friday the 13th Part II*. Specifically, the idea that Jason has somehow tracked down this woman who lopped off his mother's head and kills her in her very own kitchen.

That particular iteration of Jason has al-

ways been the scariest to me, because he's an urban legend made real. He's not a boy, but not yet a black phallus-blob thing; he's just a sad weirdo who lives in the woods. He's built himself a little lean-to. He wears a sack on his head to hide his face from anyone he encounters, or maybe from himself lest he catch his reflection in the lake that (sort of) claimed his life. He is content to mind his own weirdo business until his mother is murdered, causing him to flip out and build a shrine to her, complete with her raisin-like head and rotting sweater. (Side note: It must have been strange for the Crystal Lake Police to come upon her headless and sweaterless corpse, no? I'd love to see the obit in the local paper.)

But somehow, this lumbering man-child is able to figure out which plucky counsellor killed his mother, and then deduce where she lives (without the benefit of forensic equipment or Facebook, no less). He stuffs his mother's head in a bag, travels to Alice's suburban neighbourhood, finds her apartment, sets up the ol' disembodied head-in-the-fridge gag (because Mom would have wanted that), kills Alice, repacks Mom's head, and drags Alice's corpse all the way back home, whereupon she is added to the shrine of dead women in his life.

Despite the – to put it mildly – logistical stretch of this entire scenario, it really does take me back to all the good frights I got during my formative slasher-loving years. While I do appreciate and enjoy the hulking undead/outer space/phallic blob-thing Jasons, I am a simple girl at heart. Jason Voorhees with his own head in a sack as well as his mom's, traipsing through a suburban neighbourhood on a quest for revenge is one part ridiculous, one part terrifying, and all parts Jason for me. 🖤



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# AUDIO DROME

DEADLY

DANGEROUS

DECENT

DULL

DRIVEL

DOA  
DEAD ON  
ARRIVAL

REVIEWS BY ALEX DELLER, KRISTOF G, AARON VON LUPTON, DANIEL ROBERTSON, AND JEFF SZPIRGLAS



## THE GUEST II

Various Artists

LAKESHORE RECORDS

One of the highlights of Adam Wingard's 2014 feature *The Guest* was its great retro-sounding soundtrack. So getting a few collaborators, including original composer Steve Moore, to drop a faux score for an imagined sequel makes for a nifty idea for fans of the original. Whether or not you're familiar with Wingard's cult film, there's something in this collection that's likely to grab you, thanks to the variety of approaches on the tracks, designed to continue the story through music and song titles. In addition to the moody synth-driven underscore (to which Wingard himself contributes), there's also Ma-jure's blues-infused "Love, Extended," while "Old Habits" feels like a synth-off between Jan Hammer and John Carpenter, and "Carver's War Machine" tips its hat to the grinding industrial stylings of Nine Inch Nails. Enough here to make you wish the actual movie existed. ☠☠☠ JS

SOUNDTRACK

soundtrack to the *Forever Midnight* podcast's mini-feature *Night Drive*. A backwoods slasher homage, *Night Drive*'s music, courtesy of podcast host Josh Staples, includes a country tune, an '80s power pop homage, and synthwave, along with a *Texas Chainsaw*-score styled track. The issue is that the electronic stuff is far too modern sounding for a movie that seems designed to evoke a *Mad-man*-esque grindhouse aesthetic, and even the hillbilly number "Call Me Old Fashioned" sounds overly polished. That's likely too much criticism for a film and soundtrack that no one was supposed to take seriously but, regardless, *Night Drive* does not beg for repeat listens. ☠☠½ AVL



## MORLOCK

The Outcasts

CINEPLOIT

Andrew (Zoltan) Prestidge's spacey riffs take off to new sonic galaxies through Morlock's *The Outcasts*, a collection of trippy synthwave vibes built around Prestidge's Lovecraftian illustrations for a non-existent graphic novel. The album draws inspiration from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, John Carpenter, and Queen's *Flash Gordon* soundtrack – an apt summation of the musical style and content found here. Prestidge's pedigree includes both synth and percussion, so he's able to find a good balance on the tracks with catchy hooks, a range of sonic textures, and enough variation in the drum fills and loops to keep the whole endeavour moving from one novel idea to the next. Lo-fi synths are nicely balanced with cacophonous percussion to create the kind of big, reverberant sound that begs to be cranked to eleven. Track titles seem torn from the pages of a prog-rock playbook ("Oceanic Crustaceans," "Vulpine Megaliths"), but this adds

EXPERIMENTAL

to *The Outcasts*' geeky, widescreen charms. ☠☠☠ JS



## MERZBOW & LAWRENCE ENGLISH

Eternal Stalker

DAIS

Pairing legendary noise musician Masami Akita (Merzbow) with artist/composer Lawrence English always promises something captivating, and *Eternal Stalker* doesn't disappoint. Rooted in field recordings captured in and around a factory complex, this collaboration combines the elemental (torrential rain, howling wind, what could feasibly be human screams) with all the unending thrum and clangor of mechanized industry. As the title might suggest, the spectre of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* looms large, as does its sci-fi novel *Roadside Picnic* source material: we're thrown, with neither map nor working compass, into an unknowable landscape that, if not actively hostile, is at least uncaringly so. Perhaps it's

EXPERIMENTAL

this sense of the Other that renders *Eternal Stalker* so effective: it evokes a familiar sense of dilapidated industrialization – choking cement dust, birdshit-spattered machinery, and corroded, cast-off junk – while taking things yet further, into the kind of cold, extreme, alien realms conjured by the likes of J.G. Ballard and Brian Evenson. ☠☠☠ AD



## GENKI GENKI PANIC

(This is) Dungeon Surf

OTITIS MEDIA RECORDS

Atlanta's prolific surf trio is at it again, riding more waves of tiki terror. If you are familiar with this energetic brand of punky, video-game influenced surf, you won't go wrong with *(This Is) Dungeon Surf*, which could also serve as an effective introduction for uninitiated listeners. Though a couple of tracks feature vocals, the instrumentals is where the band shines. Stand-out cuts include "Radon Chong," with its traditional spooky melody twisted around syncopated hip-hop beats and

SURF



## NIGHT DRIVE

Josh Staples

HAUNTED SCREEN

From Scott Johannsson, co-owner of the Ondes Positives label (responsible for the deluxe 2xLP soundtrack of Canadian classic *The Mask*), comes new imprint Haunted Screen, apparently dedicated to short film scores. We're guessing this means a lot of 7-inch releases and, sure enough, Haunted Screen's first outing is a vinyl EP

SOUNDTRACK

## THE DESCENT

David Julyan

BURNING WITCHES RECORDS

Neil Marshall's *The Descent* required a delicate balance of sound design and music to adequately give a sense of scale to the cave setting and the unique timbres of the film's subterranean monsters. David Julyan's score has a hugely important role to play in this, sparsely spotted at first, and then taking centre stage in the movie's second half. His melancholic chords and textures play to the film's underlying tragedy, and also function as layers of ambient noise reverberating from within the caves themselves. There are some nifty callouts to earlier classics; a thudding heartbeat recalls Ennio Morricone's *The Thing*, while as the tension ramps up in the second half, violent brass sonorities bring to mind James Horner's work on *Aliens*. Though it may seem like a temp track playbook, Julyan's music is near perfect, and how well it stands up on its own really amounts to how well you want to re-experience the entire score sans image. ☠☠☠½ JS

SOUNDTRACK





# PODCASTS FROM BEYOND



## FREAKY FOLKLORE

**THEME:** Spooky folklore

**FORMAT:** Tales and lore

**FREQUENCY:** Roughly weekly

A relative newcomer to the podcast world, *Freaky Folklore* has been going strong since the beginning of 2021 and is part of the Eeriecast horror podcast network. Host Carman Carrion weaves tales of myth and legend around an ed-

ucational interlude, giving the listener well-researched background about the lore in question. One of the most interesting aspects of the weekly show is how far and wide it casts its net: you'll find episodes dedicated to classic cryptids such as werewolves and yeti, as well as international fare like the Filipino aswang and the African Tokoloshe. Reaching further still, the podcast delves into more contemporary creepypasta and tabloid-fodder, including Slender Man and the mythical "Black-Eyed Children," even stretching to such oddball outliers as the vanishing of Elisa Lam in 2013. Though well organized, *Freaky Folklore* does have its amateur moments, but the lo-fi production somehow adds to its charm. Carrion speaks in a low hushed voice with a soothing Southern accent, creating an overall vibe akin a PBS show in the '80s (for those who remember). In some episodes, the line between fact and fiction is blurred, so listeners are best advised to go in with a curious mind without losing grip on critical thinking. Even so, *Freaky Folklore* is a captivating podcast that casts a long shadow that belies its humble means. ☠️☠️☠️½ **DENMAN**

**C. ANDERSON**



## RUINED!

**THEME:** Horror movie discussion

**FORMAT:** Conversation

**FREQUENCY:** Weekly

Nothing brings out the torches and pitchforks on social media quite like spoiling a movie or TV show, so it comes as a surprise that this podcast is based around the sole objective of doing just that. The aptly titled *Ruined!* features a hor-

ror hound named Halle Kiefer who breaks down entire films for Alison Leiby, her easily frightened yet FOMO-cursed friend. Usually involving a movie with a (loosely defined) "twist" end, the weekly show covers a wide variety of horror, from legacy classics like *Hellraiser*, to hot-off-the-scream-screen flicks such as *The Night House*. *Ruined!* keeps things interesting with live shows, themed months, listener polls, and recurring bits. In the latter, Leiby is tasked to answer periodic questions such as: what is the twist end? What would you do? And what fatal mistakes did these poor souls make? Though Kiefer and Leiby fill the show with their polarizing big fun aunt energy, occasionally a pervasive matter-of-fact tone flattens their dynamic. Still, *Ruined!* is worth a listen, especially for those who, like Leiby, have trouble sitting through an entire horror movie. ☠️☠️☠️½ **DENMAN**

**C. ANDERSON**

dissonant keyboard plinks, and "Non-consensual Gender Reassignment in a Haunted House," which gives off decidedly Eastern vibes with fuzzed-out 8-bit noodling in the background. A personal favourite is "Massive Severed Laphog in a Paper Bag," with its memorably haunting outro. That said, production layers are dense and complex, and maybe even a little too clean – I would have preferred a little more sea sand caught in these grooves. ☠️☠️☠️½ **DR**



## GO GO KILLERS

PUNK

**House of Mysterious Secretsions**

INDEPENDENT

The Go Go Killers' self-described "wreck n roll" could also be described as "sounding a lot like The Cramps; that hasn't changed much on latest offering *House of Mysterious Secretsions*, but some variations do come up in these 25 tracks of swampy punk rock. The B-movie titled "Yeti in a Girl's Dormitory" is a heavy number centred around a mean swinging riff, "The Manster" is a minimalist slinky rocker, and "Destination NFG" is a bona fide Link Wray surf wiggler. Come to think of it, this all still sounds a lot like The Cramps, and the naughty titles like "I Dream of Vagenie" and "The Devil Went Down on Georgia" only hammer home that these dudes are reading the same smutty magazines that Lux Interior did. If imitation is the best form of flattery, then Go Go Killers do it well. There are worse ways to waste your Saturday night. ☠️☠️☠️½ **AVL**



## TEMPLE OF VOID

METAL

**Summoning the Slayer**

RELAPSE

Temple of Void has been wallowing in extreme metal's murkier pits for the

better part of a decade, and this latest effort sees the group vomit forth its most potent and refined work yet. While in the past, the band might've mixed death and doom metal as though stirring human soup with a femur, *Summoning the Slayer* is seasoned with subtler moments, patches of progressive intrigue, and, on closing track "Dissolution," a mix of acoustic guitars and clean, almost dreamy vocals. That's not to say that the band has hung up its heavy metal spurs, because for the most part things are crushing, savage, and mind-alteringly horrific. The slight sonic shift, though, is also matched by a psychic one; rather than tales of beasts, fiends, and embalmers, the band now seems focused on more numinous horrors – those that lurk within, as well as the nameless, faceless terrors that exist in the spaces we can't quite perceive. ☠️☠️☠️ **AD**



## PREDATORY LIGHT

METAL

**Death and the Twilight Hours**

20 BUCK SPIN

Predatory Light's new four-song sophomore long-play, *Death and the Twilight Hours*, offers 38 minutes of the kind of epic and melodic blackened doom metal you desperately need. Songs range from six to thirteen minutes of blasting, cavernous bangers. The record was produced/mixed by Andrew Oswald, marking the third time he's worked with the band (counting its death side-project Superstition). *Death and the Twilight Hours* has old school metal drive, filled with crunchy riffs, as if High on Fire went on vacation in Hell's purgatory... or maybe an early Tribulation vibe. Inspired solos emerge in the title track, with some great tapping to boot. It's the kind of record Glenn Tilson (Rest in Power, brother) would have dug. ☠️☠️☠️ **KG**





# GLENN TILSON

1971-2022 R.I.P.



**T**HIS PAST APRIL I SENT OFF A REVIEW ASSIGNMENT TO ONE OF THE AUDIO DROME'S LONGEST TENURED WRITERS, GLENN TILSON. Nothing particularly exceptional about the request, except that I never heard back. A few days later I received a text informing me that he had passed away peacefully in his sleep. Shocked, I logged into Facebook, where Glenn interacted with fellow metalheads, horror fans, and other weirdos daily, only to see the tributes pouring in.

Still reeling from the news, I reached out to some of his best friends to learn more about what happened, and it was only then that I really learned how much he was truly loved within our community.

Growing up just outside Toronto in suburban Mississauga, Glenn was your typical horror-obsessed outsider, but one who was especially drawn to the darkest aspects of human nature. Perhaps that is why Glenn never really took to social interaction; he found an outlet for his passions through writing, mostly short stories and poetry, though little of it was published before he began his post at *Rue Morgue* in 2013.

As a true '80s high-school misfit, Glenn also gravitated towards metal music, and was a major champion of black metal (Darkthrone was his all-time favourite band). Those who followed him on social media knew he was also a huge fan of several other horror-related music genres, including horrorcore artists such as Necro but also, curiously, pop divas like Britney Spears. You simply could not pigeonhole Glenn Tilson.

In movies, Glenn was driven to the extremes and was a major proponent of French new wave films such as *Martyrs* and *Inside*, along with the violent *giallo* classics from the masters. But, really, he was just

drawn to anything that expressed the same existential dread that he seemed to carry with him throughout his life. He became a scholar in the works of H.P. Lovecraft and, like Lovecraft, largely avoided people, preferring instead the comfort of cosmic horror.

Whenever anyone is eulogized, we tend to focus on their good qualities to the point of hyperbole. With Glenn, the same things that many people loved about him may also have contributed to his undoing. Though his frequent social media posts often revealed a self-deprecating sense of humour, they sometimes dipped too far south, where one could glimpse at deeper pain. Those closest to him often experienced him putting himself down, despite being told how much he was loved. He was known for cancelling plans at the last minute and, truthfully, he sometimes blanked on writing assignments, an indicator that his darkest thoughts were starting to get the best of him. Those who survive him, his best friends, always noted how they never met a more selfless person. As one said in tribute: "He asked for so little, yet gave so very much."

I'll end this with a section from a poem Glenn wrote in high school, one that seems to capture his essence as a fan and outsider who found family in the dark.

*They'll have a chance to point their fingers  
At horror films and metal singers  
It means nothing in case doubt lingers  
Nothing much at all.*

Rest in power, Glenn. You'll be missed. 🧟



# PLAY DECAD



## NOW PLAYING > YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN BY EVAN MILLAR

Even the most casual gamer in the mid-'90s who visited an arcade just once has probably already rubbed elbows with Sega's *The House of the Dead* series — a classic horror title that was among the first to offer a survival horror experience by allowing you to shoot undead enemies with a plastic “light gun” rather than a joystick controller. Oozing with truly abysmal dialogue, music, and pixelated gore, the franchise remains a classic of the era that spawned several sequels across every gaming platform generation throughout the decades that followed. With all the reboots, remasters, and revivals of late, it's surprising that it's taken so long for the series to get a proper remake.

Enter Polish developer MegaPixel Studio with the simply named *The House of the Dead: Remake* for the Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation and Xbox systems. Putting players in the shoes of special government agents Thomas Rogan and G, the objective is to rescue a team of researchers from the clutches of mad scientist Dr. Curien and his bio-engineered ghoulies.

Gameplay is as simple as it ever was for this title: if it moves, shoot it. Shoot it *a lot*. Shoot it until it's falling apart, reduced to a bubbling pile of green offal, teetering off the edge of a 60-foot-tall balcony. Blow the heads off of a few unsuspecting men and women in lab coats, while you're at it — no penalty for friendly fire here. It's that beautifully simple set-up and execution that has kept *The House of the Dead* floating like a bloated corpse at the very top of my horror gaming memories, but does such a simple conceit hold up in 2022?

While it's true that every entry in the series has been ported onto the consoles of its day, that's never been the best way to play these games due to the awkwardness found in steering a reticle around the screen with just a thumbstick — clunky though that light gun was, it was crucial to the experience. This is why the curiosity of the latest *House of the Dead* game exclusively launching on consoles without any VR support has been taking me down a philosophical horror nerd rabbit hole of sorts. On one hand, I'm a big supporter of change and evolution in gaming; not a day goes by that I'm not thankful I can play nearly any game I want, wherever I wish. For instance, I can play the new *House of the Dead* in a graveyard at night on my Switch, and



that's cool as hell.

Still, preservation of games as they were originally intended is of utmost importance to me, especially these days when so many video game manufacturers and publishers make it nigh impossible to obtain older titles. And to add insult to injury, there's also the decline of the arcade as a profitable business, at least in the West. Odds are that if you want to play *The House of the Dead* in its original glory, you'd have to contact some local collectors, take a trip to Japan, or invent a functioning time machine. Objectively, this fucking sucks.

Just like the wriggling limbs blasted off of these reanimated corpses, *The House of the Dead: Remake* feels far removed from its core when presented in such a casual, convenient manner.

This isn't a critique on the quality or necessity of the game as a remake, however. MegaPixel does wonders at recreating familiar locales

and enemies despite not being able to use any assets from Sega's original release as reference, and it's evident that a lot of love went into modernizing a horror gaming subgenre that, save from some VR “shooting gallery” games, doesn't really exist anymore.

It's great knowing that with this release, a whole generation of horror gamers that have potentially never stepped foot in an arcade are going to be introduced to such an important series. Still, I just can't shake the feeling that it's at the cost of the bigger picture — a picture that's already blood-spattered and slipping out of frame into obscurity. Not to be that boomer bemoaning the simpler days of gaming gone by, but can a title like *House of the Dead* really translate from the arcade to the living room without that gimmick and atmosphere? Maybe some things should stay dead — if only to make room for the new.



*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

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IT'S NO SECRET THAT CARTOONS AREN'T JUST FOR KIDS — INDEED, MANY AN ANIMATED FILM HAS TRAUMATIZED YOUNGSTERS AND GROWN-UPS ALIKE WITH SURREAL IMAGERY THAT LIVE ACTION CAN'T COMPETE WITH. BUT WHICH IS THE SCARIEST? TWO WRITERS ENTER THE RING TO BATTLE IT OUT...

## WHAT IS THE MOST TERRIFYING ANIMATED HORROR FILM EVER MADE?

ALISON LANG

**Akira (1988)**

"Akira is the most terrifying animated horror movie of all time."

I FIRST SAW THE LEGENDARY 1988 CYBERPUNK ANIME FILM *Akira* later in my adult life, which is good, because it would have reduced my feeble teenage brain to goo. Of course, I was dazzled: the stunning, kinetic animation, the rad motorcycle chases through degraded cityscapes, and the unapologetically anarchic and anti-authoritarian themes were thrilling. However, I was most struck by the utter *nightmarishness* of this film — its buckets of gore, contempt for human minds and flesh, and nihilistic prophecy of total nuclear destruction had me lying awake at night like few other films have. Make no mistake — *Akira* is the most terrifying animated horror movie of all time.

Sure, the capital-H horror anime like *Perfect Blue* and *Uzumaki* might fit more neatly in this debate. But part of *Akira*'s horror is that it feels so cavalier — set in a world recovering from a gutting nuclear explosion, being torn apart by lawless extremity, horror is simply part of its everyday fabric. Characters are haunted by hallucinations of fanged teddy bears, wizened telekinetic children hidden by the government, and gunfights that cause bodies to burst like ripened fruit.

*Akira*'s jaw-dropping *pièce de résistance* occurs at its climax when the formerly nerdy, newly telekinetic antagonist Tetsuo becomes drunk with power and loses control of his abilities. His body rapidly expands into a massive gooey mass of writhing, screaming flesh, squeezing his girlfriend Kaori's body until it explodes and, at one point, assuming the shape of a giant goopy baby. It's an unflinching piece of body horror that will burn your retinas forever.

*Akira* imagines a city both recovering from and under threat of nuclear eruption, governed by simpletons, with an opportunistic military, religious fanatics and anti-war protesters tearing the city apart, unable to find resolution. It's here that Tetsuo's solution almost feels viable — destroy everything you love, in the hopes that it may rise again. *Akira*'s horror is visceral, palpable, and entirely too prescient for comfort.

LENA REID

**Gyo: Tokyo Fish Attack (2012)**

"You'll never look at sushi — or your own asshole — the same way again."

ADMITTEDLY, THE SUBTITLE *TOKYO FISH ATTACK* CONJURES A CHEESY POORLY DUBBED *KAIJU* FLICK, where giant rubber-suited merfolk invade Tokyo's shores to the bewilderment of an unsuspecting metropolis. But 2012's *Gyo* (Japanese for "fish") is based on a Junji Ito manga of the same name, so viewers best abandon all hope of campy laughs and familiar tropes.

In the anime film, marine wildlife does indeed invade Toyko, but these extra-odorous fish scuttle around on mechanical insect-like legs. After a couple is attacked by a great white shark in their home (!), they are able to capture a specimen and take it to their scientist uncle, who uncovers a technology that is able to turn living hosts into walking machines — and you guessed it, that includes people. Devoid of will, these machine/flesh hybrids are deadly puppets to an unseen force, even as they rot from the inside, drowning Japan in a hideous stench of deformed, undead automatons on skittering, pneumatic legs.

If this idea alone isn't terrifying enough, consider that Ito, a former dental technician, is celebrated for his ability to portray his surreal post-human body horror in great anatomical detail. Now imagine the human body reduced to a meaty battery pack, and where the tubes and rods might go.

You'll never look at sushi — or your own asshole — the same way again. But hideous practicalities aside, the true horror is, as usual, in the relentlessness of soulless machinery and technology that gives nary a fuck for the desecration of its living fuel cells. These things make the dystopian human/battery pods of *The Matrix* look like a holiday resort.

One of those horror gems that must be seen to be truly experienced, an added bonus of *Gyo* is that the 70-minute feature pulls Ito's artwork directly from the manga but contains enough narrative tweaks that fans of the book series can experience a slightly modified storyline along with some fresh fishy hell. Strap in for animated nightmares!



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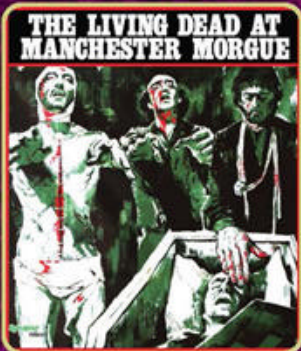


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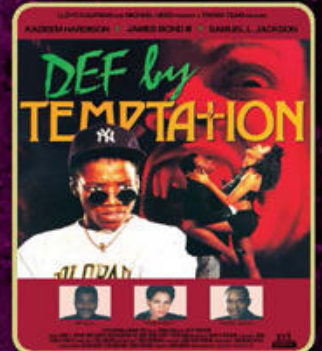
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